

# **LWF Studies**

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## **The Situations of Women in the Church in China**

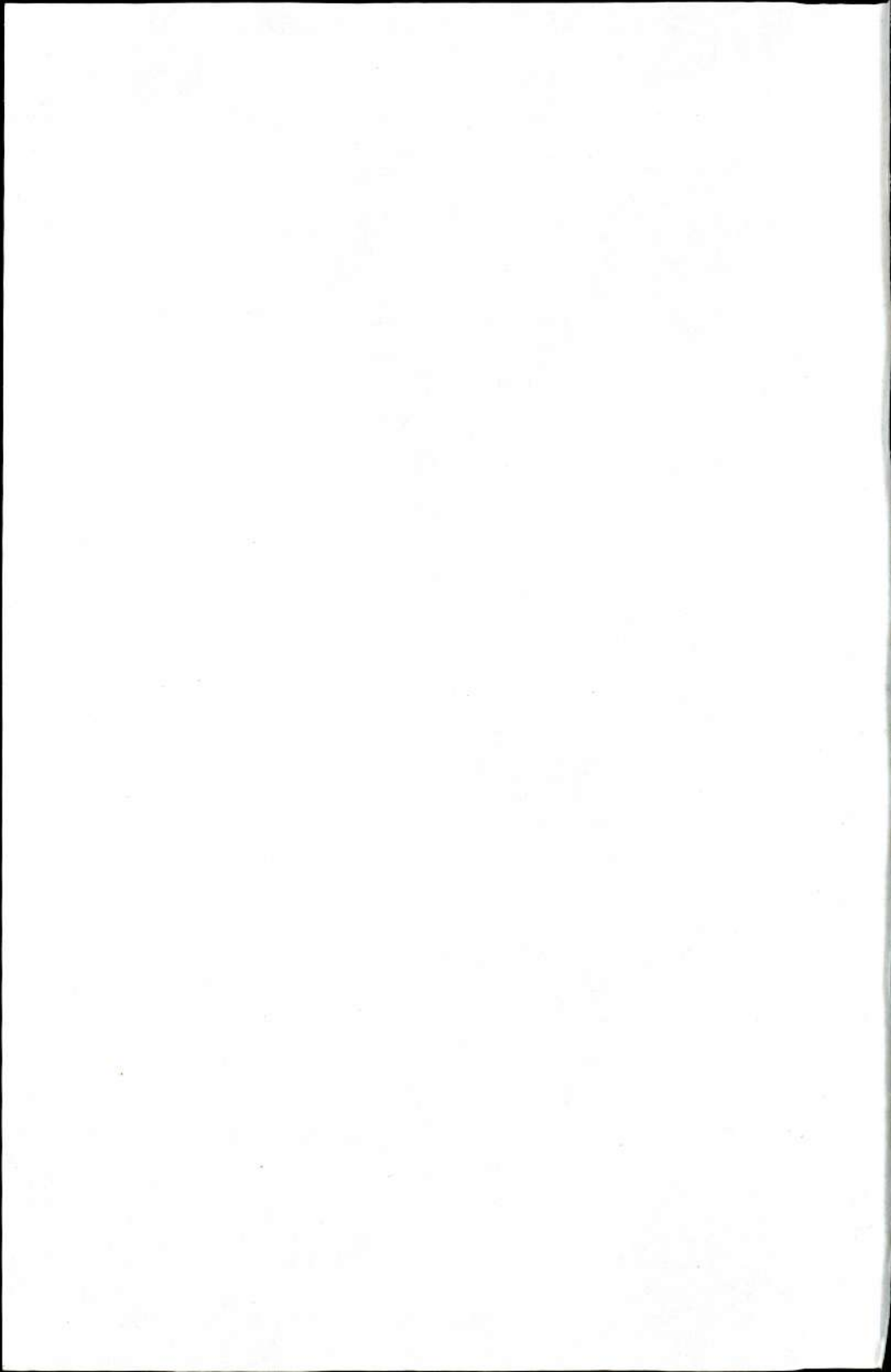
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**China Study Series    Vol.2**

**Feb. 1997**









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**The Situations of Women in  
the Church in China**

**Translated by Dr. Chau Wai-Shing**

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**The Lutheran World Federation**

**1997**

First Printing 1997

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## **Lutheran World Federation Preface**

The Lutheran World Federation has had an interest in China, the Church in China and the Chinese churches since its very beginning. Already at its founding Assembly in Lund in 1947 a Chinese theologian and pastor was present, Rev. P'eng Fu.

In the years 1971 - 83 the LWF undertook a major study that became known as "The Marxism and China Study." The purpose was "to provide a forum through which the Lutheran churches together with others, can examine and evaluate the challenge of different forms of socialism (especially the Chinese) .... and what this challenge means for the mission of the church." In a subsequent document the objectives were defined: On the one hand to hear and understand what the new value systems and ways of life have to say to the church, on the other hand to understand what the Gospel has to say and how to express the Christian witness clearly and forcefully in new situations.

That is what we always are called to, so when the General Secretary of the LWF, Dr. Gunnar Stalsett in 1992 reiterated a quest for a new China study his proposal was met with widespread approval. In his report to the LWF Council coming together in Madras, he included the following paragraph:

Let me place before you a very specific and urgent point

in this context. Having this year again visited the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, I am seized by the importance of 'everything Chinese' to the future of humanity. We are speaking about a fifth of the world's population, one of the most ancient cultures and religious-based value systems in the world. The major part of this Chinese community is under a social and political system which has failed in other parts of the world. Tiananmen Square and Tibet are names that continue to mobilize strong concerns for human rights. A worship service which I was privileged to attend in downtown Beijing with old and young worshipers, most of them with their Bible printed in China in their hands, gives cause to a nuanced assessment of the future of religious freedom. LWF conversations with government officials in China and Geneva over the past few years likewise give reasons for a cautious optimism about a place for the Christian church in this largest nation of the world....

The challenge of China today and tomorrow suggests a special study program for the period of 1994 to 1997 to be lodged in the Department for Theology and Studies and working integrally with the Department for Mission and Development, especially its Asia Desk and with the member churches. The China study carried out in the Studies Department during the years 1971--1983 might serve as a background, but its orientation must be more focused and

church oriented. Given the post-denominational orientation of Christianity in the People's Republic of China and the distinct confessional identity of our Chinese member churches, it will be imperative that the ecumenical and confessional aspects of Christian presence and witness within the Chinese culture be taken seriously. (Agenda, Meeting of the LWF Council, 1992, Exhibit 8, paras. 110, 111).

This suggestion was referred to the Program Committee for the Department Theology and Studies which discussed it at some length and the Committee VOTED

that, in response to the General Secretary's suggestion for a "new China Program," the DTS staff be requested to undertake, in cooperation with the DMD and in consultation with the church in China and the Lutheran Chinese churches, a feasibility study on goals, content and method, and submit it to the next Program Committee/Council meeting; (Proceedings of the LWF Program Committee for Theology and Studies, 1992, p. 5).

This decision was endorsed by the council with the request that the program be developed in close cooperation with the church in China and the Lutheran Chinese churches. One of the goals of the study should be to enable the churches better to proclaim the Gospel.

Upon this recommendation a number of consultations and



explorations were done with Chinese church leaders and Bishop K.H. Ting of the China Christian Council. The feasibility study showed the need for such a study and after further investigations the program finally was approved at the Council meeting in Kristiansand 1993 and a plan for its development was presented to the Council in Geneva in 1994.

The background for this positive reaction and interest in the church in China was formulated thus:

Already the demographic realities make it obvious that everything Chinese will be of importance in the years to come and that the impact of Chinese culture reaches far outside mainland China. This influence is also considerable within the churches. Seen from a historical perspective the missionary concern for China has been high on the agenda. The church in China has been in the hearts and on the minds of many Christians and it has been remembered in many prayers, especially in times when Christians have been undergoing experiences not so very different from those of the early martyrs. Because of a certain inwardness of Chinese culture one could easily be led to bypass China. This would however be to the detriment of the rest of the world. Furthermore, there seems to be little doubt that with the financial and economic revival of the whole of South Asia China will gain in importance for the whole world.

In the churches in the Lutheran communion we must prepare ourselves for the importance of the reality of every thing Chinese. So the world outside China is in need of information and communication. Here it is often mentioned that there is something to be learned from the history and struggle of the Chinese. Structures have developed and missiological methods have been used which need to be studied. This also goes for the specific Chinese spirituality and the many examples of inculturation which the history of Christianity in China and among the Chinese shows.

On the other hand there is for the church in China and among the Chinese and among people and churches outside of China a need to reflect on the experiences of the church in China and the Chinese churches. It might not be possible in a study to grasp the soul of the church in China but there are lessons to be learned.

On May 17, 1994 the formal launching of the China Study program took place in Hong Kong at the Lutheran Theological Seminary. At this ceremony it was again stressed that there is much to be learned from studying the history of Christianity and the present development of the church in China. At this occasion I mentioned:

In this day and age it is not always easy for an

international organization such as the LWF to take new initiatives. There are times when it seems to take all one's resources simply to keep going. Nevertheless one does know that if as an organization one does not renew oneself one will not live up to one's purpose. Thus the taking of a new initiative is to be seen as a sign of life and hope and to my mind the launching of the new program on China is precisely that: A sign of life and hope.

I am a member of the wider community of Lutheran churches who hopes to learn considerably from this study. I am quite sure that I shall. Already the two years we have spent preparing the study have been most instructive. Amongst other things I have been taught modesty and humility in the face of the vastness of the subject and its potential importance.

The response to this study has been quite incredible. We in the Department for Theology and Studies are called to encourage and assist sound theological reflection in the member churches. Taking our confessional heritage as the point of departure we reflect on issues which challenge the present understanding of Christianity. Thus all our programs deal with the wider issue of gospel and culture. Hence the gospel and how it relates to the Chinese culture will be an integral part of this program.



Some of you may be aware of the fact that from 1971 to 1983 the Federation already conducted a China Study. This study gave rise to quite some controversy and I believe that so far there has not been a final analysis or evaluation of this program. The study just like any other project was very much a product of its time. During the period of isolation the study certainly helped stimulate interest in China and in what was going on in China. If today we look back at the project a number of questions need to be asked. This might in fact give us a good starting point for our new venture.

Arne Sovik concludes his evaluation of the first China Study with the following words:

... General interest in China is concerned with its increasingly capitalist economy, the question of human rights and a certain unease about the future of the country. Will it evolve, as its wealth grows, into an aggressive national power in the Far East? Or will it be preoccupied with maintaining the unity of the nation by the force of a traditional nationalism combined with military power?

From the Christian point of view, interest in China is high, and the constantly changing scene raises many questions. Is the remarkable growth of the church in China, the reported interest even of some philosophical intellectuals in the

Christian world-view evidence that the Gospel is finally rooted there? Can Christianity become, even if it remains a small minority, a significant element in the post-Maoist society? Will growth continue? Or does the desperate shortage of leadership and the ubiquity of heresy mean that the reality of Chinese Christianity is less impressive than the inflated numbers that are cited even by official sources? Will the future shatter the fragile unity that is based on external threats? Starting with these, questions abound.

Questions have been abounding. They have been challenging us. With the China Study program we hope to provide some information that can help shed light on those questions.

The China Study Series is created to make the insights from the study available to a wider circle of interested people. It has from the beginning been the intention of the study program to reach out across confessional, regional and other borders. The program has from its outset been designed in an inclusive way. Therefore a group of consultants were formed in Hong Kong that could serve as a sounding board for the China Study committee and the research team. And from the beginning the program has been endorsed by the ecumenical partners, the World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia.

Information is sometimes defined as the difference which

makes a difference. By initiating this study the LWF hopes to make a difference, perhaps only that little difference which like the salt keeps the whole body safe and sound.

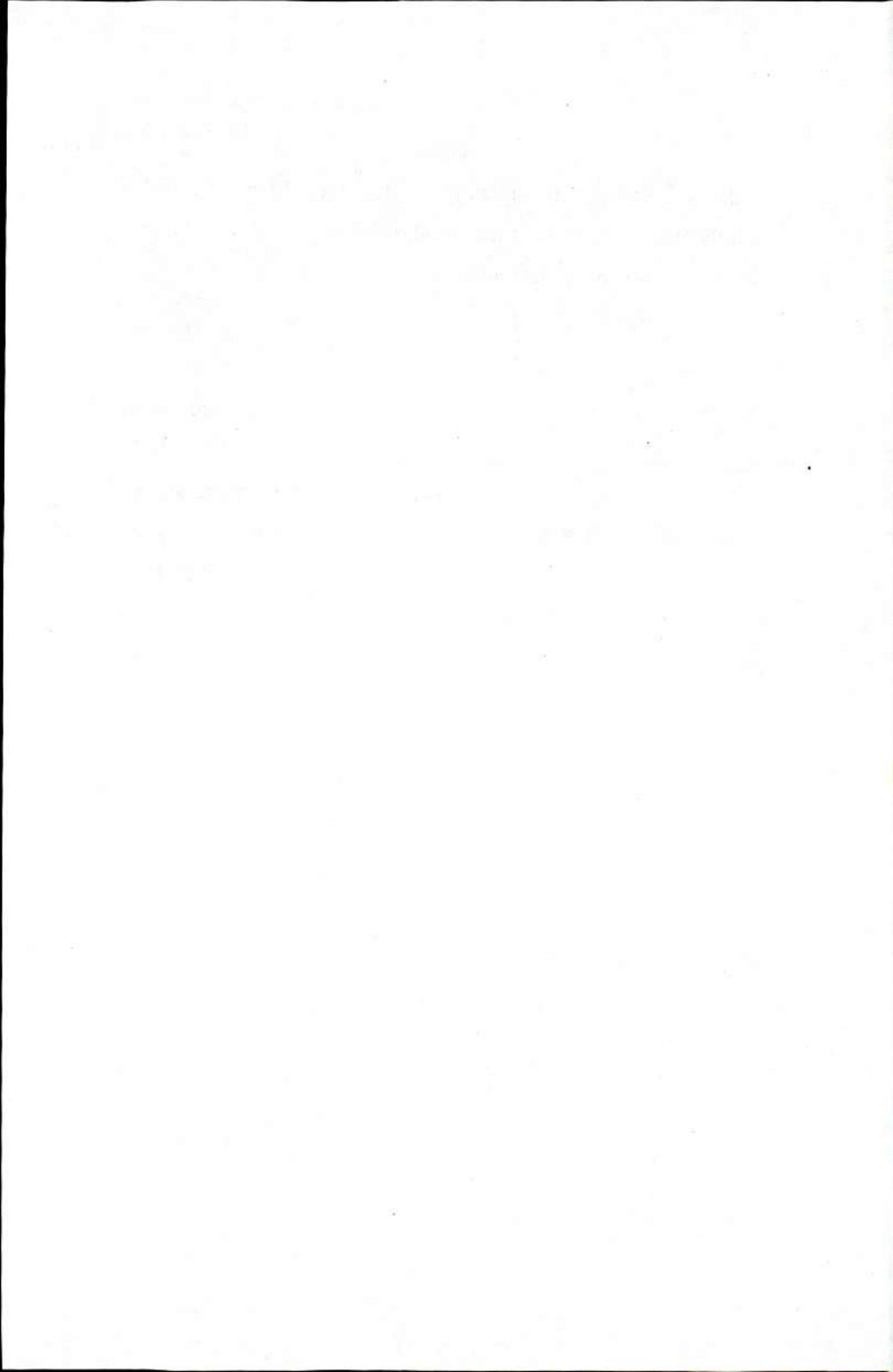
Viggo Mortensen

Director, Dr. theol.

Department for Theology and Studies

The Lutheran World Federation

November, 1996



## **China Study Series Preface**

The LWF's interest in China and China Studies has already been clearly outlined in Professor Dr. Viggo Mortensen's very enlightening LWF Preface. The genesis of the current China Study Program of LWF began in 1992 in the form of a request made by the former General Secretary, Dr. Gunnar Stalsett in his report to the LWF Council which met in Madras, India. Dr. Stalsett's emphasis on the importance of "everything Chinese" to the future of the world gained the strong support of the LWF leadership. The Program was approved by the Council in 1993 for an initial three-year period and was formally launched on May 17, 1994 at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong with four clearly stated purposes:

1. To increase the understanding of the situation of the Church in China.
2. To learn from the faith and experience of Christians in China.
3. To express solidarity with the Church and Christians in China.
4. To help prepare for the LWF Assembly in Hong Kong in July, 1997.

For logistics purposes the Program is located at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong with the Seminary's President, Dr. Lam Tak Ho as the coordinator. The China Study Committee which accompanies the Program is chaired by Prof. Dr. Choong Chee Pang of Singapore. Prof. Dr. Viggo Mortensen, the Director of the Department for Theology and Studies of LWF oversees the whole Program. A Research Team, comprised mainly of LTS staff and a Research Secretary, Mr. William Mak Wing On, was also formed.

The first China Study Committee meeting, with the participation of some of its consultants, was held from May 16 to 18, 1994 in Hong Kong. The second committee meeting took place in Hangzhou, China, from June 4 to 6, 1995. The third meeting is now scheduled for March 7 to 11, 1997 in Hong Kong.

In spite of some initial difficulties, especially in the area of coordination and research, the Research Committee has so far managed to complete three very broad areas of studies: An Overview of Contemporary Chinese Churches (main contributor: Dr. Lee Chee Gong); Understanding The Lutheran Churches (main contributor: Dr. Andrew Hsiao), and The Situations of Women in the Church in China. The fourth area of studies is now on the Role of the Bible in the Life of the Church in China.

Looking back to the past two and a half years of operation, some of the strengths as well as limitations of our logistics are quite apparent. Much time and attention will be devoted to the evaluation



of the Program at the March, 1997 Committee meeting in Hong Kong. On behalf of the Committee, I would like to express my grateful thanks to all those who have a part to play in what we believe to be a very worthwhile and exciting LWF project, especially to Prof. Dr. Mortensen for this insightful leadership, to Dr. Lam Tak Ho and his dedicated Research Committee and Research Secretary based in LTS, Hong Kong. We have just received very encouraging news from Geneva that the LWF Council, at its recent meeting in September/October, 1996, has decided to extend the China Study Program for an additional three years to the year 2000. We take this decision as a strong endorsement of the importance of the Program as we move forward, by the grace of God, to the next century-the dawn of a new millennium!

Prof. Dr. Choong Chee Pang

Chairman

The China Study Committee

November, 1996





## **Foreword**

The China research project was first proposed in 1992 by Dr. Gunnar Stalsett, general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, and the proposal was accepted by the acting committee of LWF in 1994. Dr. Viggo Mortensen, director of the research department, and Dr. Lam Tak Ho, president of the Hong Kong Lutheran Theological Seminary, were appointed for the organizing of the China Research Centre in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong was chosen as the research base because it is geographically a gateway into China, and will become part of China itself on July 1, 1997. Rich resources on China can be obtained here, and academic research can be done freely as well. It is also very convenient if there is the necessity to go into China to collect information, to do research or to hold meetings.

The opening ceremony of the China Research Centre was held at the Hong Kong Lutheran Theological Seminary in May, 1994. Well-known scholars in China and around the world have been invited to be consultants of the Centre, with Dr. Lam as the coordinator, and a team of six professors from the Seminary as the research committee. It is under their guidance that research is done.

"The Situations of Women in the Church in China" and "The Role of the Bible in the Life and Witness of the Church in China" are the two themes that the Centre has been assigned. The results will be promulgated through seminars and publications.

The outline and direction of this report, "The Situations of Women in the Church in China", was accepted by the China Study Committee in June, 1995 in Hanzhou, China. During that meeting, the members of the China Study Committee gave their valuable

opinions to this report. The Members attending that meeting were: Dr. Viggo Mortensen (director of the research department of LWF), Dr. Choong Chee Pang (chairperson), Members: Dr. Andrew Hsiao, Dr. Thomas Yu, Rev. Daniel Chong, Dr. Notto R. Thelle and two representatives from China, namely Rev. Kan Bao Ping and Mr. Chen Xi Da.

The report could be completed because of the co-operation and hardwork of the Research Committee. {Dr. Lam Tak-ho (chairperson), members: Dr. Pirkko Lehtio, Dr. Nicholas Tai, Dr. Craig Moran, Dr. Ted Zimmerman and Mr. William Mak Wing-on. (research secretary)}

After finishing the draft of this report, the Research Committee held a consultation on the topic "Women can hold up half the sky" in May, 1996 to discuss the draft. The consultants of this program, the Lutheran Church leaders and representative from the Lutheran missionary's boards joined the meeting and gave their valuable opinions. After considering their opinions, we made some revisions and formulated the report into Part I of this book. The response papers of Part II of this book were those papers presented in the meeting.

Appendix A - "Feminist Theology in Contemporary China (1980-1994)" was a term paper written by Rev. Mary Sun during her studies in the course "Women in China" in 1995. Rev. Sun was not only presenting a study of the history, she was a witness of the history, so the study is very valuable.

Appendix B - "Laws of the People's Republic of China on Protection of Rights and Interests of Women" shows the concerns of the China government about women.

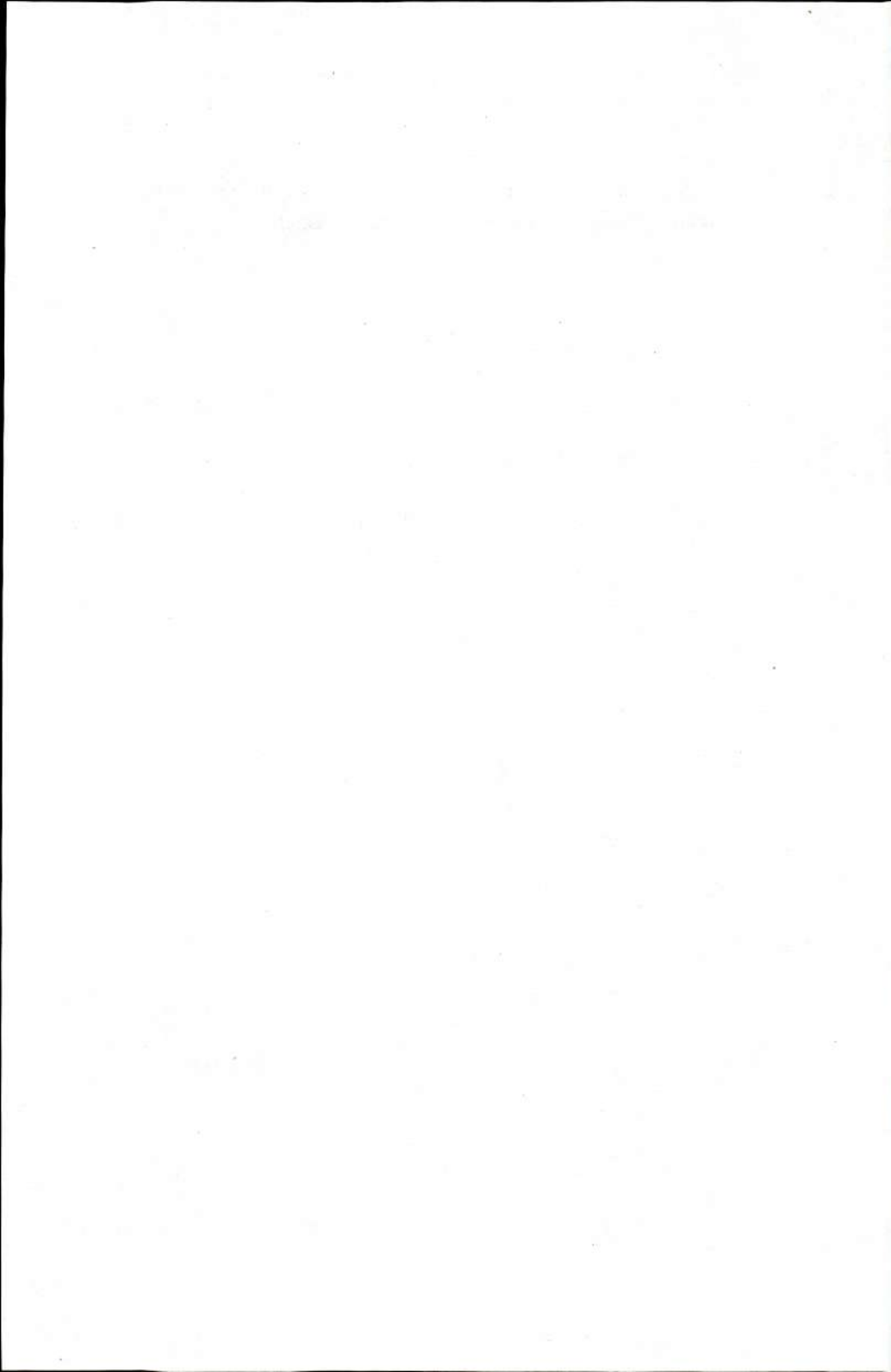
Appendix C - "Interview Form Produced by the Research Committee" was the form used during this research.

Dr. Lam Tak-ho

President of Lutheran Theological Seminary, Hong Kong

Coordinator of China Study Program

November, 1996



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# **Part I**

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## **Report**





# **Introduction**

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The women's issue is a global concern, not only for the Chinese government and its people, but even more so to Christians world-wide. Mao Zedong's word "women can hold up half of the sky" clearly reflects Chinese leaders' and their government's recognition and concern over women's contribution. On the other hand, Chinese female writer Xiao Hong once said, "I am a female. The sky of a female is low and her burden heavy". This reveals the situation of some women in shouldering the heavy burdens of living, and bearing the heavy pressures from tradition, family, work as well as society.<sup>1</sup>

Confronting the practical situation with an ideal, the Chinese government has done a lot of significant and effective work towards improving women's situation and status. However, the women's issue is very complicated, and cannot be completely resolved in a short period of time. It involves various factors ranging from cultural, political, economic to social elements, and as society is progressing continually and changing drastically, the issue becomes even more complicated. That is why it is necessary to study again the strategy of women's liberation.

Since the women's issue is a very complicated issue, and cannot be covered by one or two research papers. So we have to define our scope and concern.

We believe that today's China cannot be separated from its past. Thus the first chapter is devoted to the influence of Chinese culture upon

women, and the second chapter to the influence of society. These two chapters provide the necessary background as well as the substance for the understanding of female Christians in China, since culture and society are two aspects that define the way they live, and are at the same time the main sources of their problems and difficulties. The influence of the Christian faith and the church is of course significant, and that forms the subject of the third chapter.

Aiming at an international report touching a wide area, and considering that some readers may not know much about China, we believe a general description is better than case studies or in-depth research. In-depth research is of course important, and we hope this can be done in the future. But this is not our purpose in this paper.

Therefore our emphasis would be on general description,<sup>2</sup> and the raising up of questions. Due to the limitation of our scope, we will only put forth suggestions towards solutions in the concluding section of each chapter, rather than presuming to have solutions ourselves.

We will try our best to be unbiased and objective, reporting both the bright and the dark side. Whenever the situation is clear enough for a conclusion to be drawn, this will be done, lest the description be too loose. And we will often indicate our angle of description, so that readers will not lose track despite the abundance of information.

There are three chapters in this paper. The first chapter is "Women in Chinese traditional culture." We will begin with a

macroscopic review of the influence of traditional culture upon women. In section 1, the religious social science theory of Peter L. Berger will be employed to study how traditional culture<sup>3</sup> has shaped the self-image of women. In section 2, we want to affirm that besides the oppressive teachings, there are also in Chinese culture basic elements conducive to the development of sexual equality. Tracing back to its origin, Chinese culture depicts society as an organic entity, stressing mutual cooperation and the concept of *ren*. It is only under the feudalistic structure that the culture became oppressive to women, distorting the concept of equality, fortifying inequality, advocating the class differentiation between kings and courtiers, male and female.

The second chapter is "Women in contemporary Chinese society". We will study the issues of women from the aspects of career, politics, education, law and family, investigating what the government has done in the past forty years with regard to the raising of women's status, and evaluating its effectiveness. We will also discuss the difficulties and challenges that women are facing in this drastically changing society, and point out that culture and economy are the causes of these difficulties.

The third chapter is "Women in the contemporary Chinese church". As this is a broad topic, we can only focus on the description of the general situation of women in the church, and the concern of the church for women. Section 1 will be devoted to the general situation of women in the church. Using women and church growth as the main

theme, we will describe the situation of women with respect to general information, women's status, difficulties faced, and their contribution. As there is a lack of wholistic research, what we can do in striving to be objective is to point out both the positive and the negative aspects. In section 2, we will describe how the church has shown its care for women despite its limited resources, raising the status of women in the church and showing concern for women in society.

In the conclusion, we will discuss what we can learn from the experience of China.

## Chapter Notes

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<sup>1</sup>Ed., "Sky of the Female is Low," *Feeling and Thinking about the Nation (Gan Guo. Si Guo)*, Pilot issue (1995), p.7.

<sup>2</sup>We understand that situations in China are very complicated and pluralistic. There are differences between cities and villages, coastal area and inland, and there are also tribal and religious divergencies. But it is inappropriate to become too complicated and confusing in a report, so we tend to describe the common phenomena, though we are well aware that there are numerous cases that differ from our description.

<sup>3</sup>We want to differentiate between "Chinese traditional culture" and "Chinese culture". The latter refers to the original teachings of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, while the former refers to the interpretation and exploitation of these three schools of teachings to the oppression of female.



# **Chapter One**

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## **Women in Chinese Traditonal Culture**

## Introductory Comments

Chinese culture is formed from the intertwining of the three traditions of Confucianism,<sup>1</sup> Taoism<sup>2</sup> and Buddhism.<sup>3</sup> At first they were rivalling parties and were mutually criticizing, but they gradually merged together to become mutually exploiting and complementary, and hence lost their ability to develop through mutual criticism. As a result, later developments of Buddhism and Taoism were in Confucian eyes no longer heretical nor even sectarian. Jing Guantao and Liu Qingfeng, in their book *Prosperity and Crisis*, regard Taoism as a complementary form of Confucianism. They point out, "Usually a dominating ideological structure will repudiate alien ideological structures, just like a dominating religion rejecting other religions. But a dominating ideological structure will not repel its complementary forms."<sup>4</sup> Therefore, it is not difficult to notice that there are many similar ethical teachings in later Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, forming together a culture oppressive to women.

This gradual merging of the three schools to form the traditional culture will be the theme of the first section. In it we can discern some teachings discriminatory to women, which remain influential after centuries. It is difficult for us to know whence our thought and behaviour originated, but it is certain that our present thought and behaviour are often informed by our traditional culture, in the forms of value judgment, ethical teaching, thinking patterns,



social structure, family and marital style, habits and styles of living, etc. Through formal education, family education, social assimilation and various mechanism (such as the division of labour, educational system, official appointment system, ritual customs), the traditional culture is inherited and sustained, even shaping women's self-image, to the oppression of women until this day.<sup>5</sup>

In the second section, we will show that Chinese culture sees society as an organic entity, stressing mutual cooperation and ethical personality, and embodying the basic elements for the development of the concept of sexual equality. We will demonstrate that those oppressive teachings toward women are in fact distortions of Chinese culture.

## Section One : Women under Traditional Culture

As the traditional concepts of women and ethics becomes widely spread,<sup>6</sup> forming customs and structures, women experience various kinds of oppression.<sup>7</sup> Through the process of religious rationalization, these concepts become dogma, shaping women's low self-image.<sup>8</sup>

### A. Traditional Understanding of Women

Confucius, the founder of Confucianism, seems to have put women and the vulgar in the same category. This can be seen in his famous word from Book XVII of the *Analects* that "Women and the vulgar are difficult to get along. When you let them get too close, they become insolent. If you keep them at a distance, they will blame."

It has been pointed out that the Taoist life-nourishing method of "bedroom art" treats women only as a tool for men to train his body by absorbing women's essence. Men's nourishing and strengthening are the sole concern, without any consideration of the well-being of women nor the responsibility for posterity.<sup>9</sup>

Giving birth to a boy is habitually called "the joy of playing jade," while giving birth to a girl is referred to as "the joy of playing porcelain." As jade is more precious than porcelain, a boy is more

treasured than a girl.

The sins of women are also condemned in many places in Buddhist sutras, emphasizing their weakness and associating them with seduction to sin. That is why there is a very strict sexual prohibition in Buddhism.<sup>10</sup> Some Buddhist texts exhort people to stay away from women, advocating that it is difficult, if not impossible, for women to become buddha.<sup>11</sup>

Women have been seen as the cause of trouble. Beautiful women or powerful women often bring destruction, even natural catastrophes.<sup>12</sup>

## **B. Traditional Ethical Teachings**

The application of this contempt upon women in the area of ethics brings various kinds of oppression upon the female. Traditional ethics teaches "Three Principles,"<sup>13</sup> "Three Obedience and Four Virtues,"<sup>14</sup> and "Man governs external affairs, woman looks after internal affairs." All these make women subordinate to men, taking away their own independent value. And this concept has extended to the area of family and social ethics.

### **1. Social Ethics**

Chinese tradition teaches that "man governs external affairs, while woman looks after internal affairs." Thus a woman refers to

her husband as "the external one," and a husband refers to his wife as his "internal helper" or "the internal one." This means that the husband is in charge of all business outside the family, while the wife is responsible for issues within the family and the nurturing of children. The domain of a woman is the family.<sup>15</sup> The *Book of Rites* (*Li Ji*) states, "Man should not talk about internal affairs, and woman should not talk about external business." It is clearly stated here that women cannot handle anything outside the family, and they are hence restricted from working and development in society.<sup>16</sup>

This concept is further extended to the education of women, limiting their training to the traditional roles and virtues. The *Four Books for Women*<sup>17</sup> (*Nu Si Shu*) were specifically dedicated to the education of women in ancient China, promoting women's way of "Three Obedience" and "Four Virtues." The core teaching of this woman education is that the male is superior and the female inferior, which is based on Confucian hierarchy of heaven and earth, *qian* and *kun*, *yin* and *yang*. On these basis, sexual discrimination becomes a dogma.<sup>18</sup>

At the beginning, women could still receive the education of the "Four Virtues," but later even this opportunity of education was widely objected; women could at most learn how to be good wives.<sup>19</sup> Some more open-minded men did suggest allowing women to learn literary writings besides women virtues. But even so, educated women could only take literary writings as their pastime. Some

even had guilty feelings in exhibiting their literary creativity, thinking that this did not match their role as women.<sup>20</sup> This guilty feeling can also be cultivated from another traditional teaching that "a woman with no education is virtuous."<sup>21</sup>

This idea has snatched away women's opportunity in receiving education. They are at most permitted to have the traditional "women teachings," thus limiting their opportunity for development. This concept of "man outside, women inside" also extends to politics, forbidding women from participation in political affairs, lest the nation be destroyed.<sup>22</sup>

The roles of different sexes in traditional society determined the system of employment (it was difficult for women to get a job in society), the educational system (schools were for men only), as well as the system of political participation (women were not allowed to sit for the official appointment examinations). This rendered women incapable of having any opportunity for development in society. Under this traditional culture and structure, women seldom had the opportunity to get a job; even when they did have one, they usually took it as a financial support for the family rather than as development of personal career and personality.

As time goes by, women gradually believe it is their natural duty to take care of her family and children, and to have a son to sustain the lineage. Most women consider career, politics, power,



fame as things outside the family, belonging to the realm of men, and they are not interested in joining and learning them.

## 2. Family Ethics

Confucianism emphasizes human morality, encouraging people to be moral beings. Ever since the "Three Principles" and "Three Obedience and Four Virtues" became ethical norms in traditional culture, women have been constrained to a subordinate role in the family.

Merged with the traditional view towards marriage and family, this concept is gradually accepted as custom and structure. Under this structure, women are dependants of men. Before marriage, women have to be obedient to their fathers, to be virtuous and gentle. Their marriage has to follow the tradition of "parents' order and middlewomen's words," which can easily become a trade, enabling some parents to reimburse themselves with wedding gifts for the expenditure in raising up their daughters.

After marriage, a woman belongs to her husband's family. She has to assume her husband's family name, and be obedient to her husband and her parents-in-law. If she makes any mistake, the

husband can divorce her according to the "Seven Rules."<sup>23</sup> If she, though virtuous, is barren, the husband has to get a concubine in order to have offsprings.<sup>24</sup> The Male is honoured in the family,

while the female is despised. The status of a woman can be raised through begetting a son. But if she has only daughters, she will be ignored. In the family, woman is the property of man, while she herself has no right to any property.<sup>25</sup> Only sons can inherit; as a result, the fate of a woman depends on whether she has a son.

If the husband passes away, a woman cannot get married again. Her task is to raise up her children until they are established. When she becomes old, she has to obey her son. Having no value on her own, a woman is considered to be simply an instrument.

A woman is a dependant of the father, the husband and the son. Being raised up under this structure, a woman would easily be shaped as to submit to all the constraints. Woman's virtue is to be obedient to men, to be dependent and submissive, to sacrifice selflessly for men and the family. The success of her husband and sons is her own success.

### **C. Deepening of the Traditional Concept**

Chinese traditional cosmology is a fusion of various schools of thought,<sup>26</sup> rationalizing the doctrines of "Three Obedience and Four Virtues," "Three Principles" and "Male outside, female inside," shaping the traditional concept of man being superior to woman, and teaching that these doctrines are in accordance with the "principles of heaven." Those who violate are against heaven.



One of the foundations of the concept of man being superior to woman is in the doctrine of *yin yang qian kun* from *The Book of Changes (Yi Jing)*. Thus it says, "As the heaven is superior to the earth, so the positions of *qian* and *kun* are fixed. *Qian* forms the male and *kun* forms the female. *Qian* is strong; *kun* is subservient. *Qian* is hard; *kun* is tender." Thus natural phenomena lend support to the doctrine. Heaven, *qian*, strength and hardness signify the male, while the female is signified by earth, *kun*, subservience and tenderness. Everything is in-born, predestined and unalterable. As heaven is superior to earth, male is superior to female, and the tender woman should be subservient to the strong man.<sup>27</sup>

Based on the metaphysics and cosmology as mentioned above, Confucian texts such as the *Book of Rites (Li Ji)* states, "Man leads woman, and woman follows man; such is the beginning of a proper relationship between husband and wife." This teaching of woman following man is naturally applied in various aspects of rituals and the order of living.<sup>28</sup>

Taoism and Buddhism as religions<sup>29</sup> do not regard benefits as their highest goal of exercise. They instead strive for religious ideals. Thus even when a female convert is oppressed by unreasonable events or the structure itself, the rulers, or man, can interpret it as a kind of religious training, exhorting her that her suffering from unreasonable treatment will be compensated for in heaven.<sup>30</sup>

The teaching of fate in Buddhism accounts for failure and pain by the fatalistic *pratyaya*. In this world view bitterness is unalterable; what can be done is to accept and endure. So when women suffer, they should endure.<sup>31</sup>

Taoist folk belief advocates judgments from gods and demons. This, together with the Buddhist folk belief of reward and punishment, induces women to hope for a future recompense instead of immediate action for righteousness and justice.<sup>32</sup> Taoism has a further teaching on merits. The virtues of women are however determined by Confucian ethics (such as Three Obedience and Four Virtues, uneducated, etc.). Thus women have to submit to the control of men, whether they want to obtain blessing or to avoid evil.



Taoism and Buddhism differ significantly from Confucianism with respect to their metaphysical thought and concern, but as far as ethics is concerned, they borrow from, fuse with, and add to the Confucian teachings on human relationship as part of their religious cultivation. Thus they can co-exist with Confucianism peacefully.

On the other hand, Confucianism has to rationalize its ethics with Taoist and Buddhist metaphysics, exploiting their religious nature to soothe the populace. As a result, Taoism and Buddhism

can complement Confucianism, mutually supporting each other, forming a complementary structure instead of being antagonists which can develop further through mutual criticism.

In such a way, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism join hands in forming a Chinese traditional culture of constraints upon women. Confucian ethical teachings, Buddhist teaching of recompense, and Taoist teaching of judgment combine into an internal religious faith and ethical view. With the further addition of an external structure, women are strongly bound.<sup>33</sup>

We are not against the idea that women should care for the family, be virtuous, and sacrifice for the family. What we want to point out is that women should be given freedom of choice and independence on these matters, and that work should be given according to talents, not according to gender.

## **Section Two : Re-affirmation of Chinese Culture**

Chinese culture conceives society as an organic entity, emphasizing mutual cooperation and ethical personality, which embodies the basic elements for the development of sexual equality. The oppressive teachings towards women are in fact distortions of Chinese culture. In ancient times, men and women were equal.<sup>34</sup> The traditional culture and structure of the oppression of women were only gradually formed as a result of some social and human factors.

### **A. Formation of the Traditional Culture**

Before the period of the Western Zhou dynasty (1066 B.C.), women enjoyed an honourable status. The study of tortoise shell fortune telling reveals that noble women of the Shang dynasty played important political roles. At that time, social status was more important than gender.<sup>35</sup> After the Western Zhou (1066 B.C.), agricultural development necessitated a division of labour, and it slowly became obvious that man governed things outside while women governed things inside. Family property gradually became personal belongings of men, and women's status fell. Discrimination against women and limitation of their roles gradually became predominant.<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, if what will be discussed in the following two



sections are valid, namely, that there was an equality towards women and an equality in ethics, it can be seen that this practice of the division of sexual roles had been in existence for several centuries before Confucius. In order not to add coal to the fire of social turbulence, Confucius and Mencius advocated an ethical personality of self-denial and *ren* under the premise of not changing the existing structure. It was only in the Han dynasty that the system of rites became so ossified that the teaching of men being superior to women became popular and various inhumane doctrines were formulated. Such were apparently not the intention of Confucius and Mencius, but were only the ruling tactics of those in power, who were generally referred to as Confucians.<sup>37</sup>

Buddhist teachings discriminatory to women were stated as adaptations to their contemporary social context; its doctrine on women is basically equalitarian. Buddha did inhibit his aunt from becoming a nun, out of consideration of the popular thinking at that time; nevertheless, he finally supported her decision.<sup>38</sup>

We can notice some teaching debasing women in the Buddhist sutras, especially those of Hinayana Buddhism.<sup>39</sup> But these are all adaptations, not doctrinal teachings. That is why the Mahayana *Lotus Sutra* says that Hinayana Buddhism is only a city of metaphor, an imaginary city established for the sake of teaching, and is not the real destination. The real destination is that all, men and women, will be awakened.<sup>40</sup>

On the other hand, over time, the sutras began to pay more attention to women. The *Saddharmapundarika Sutra* mentions explicitly about women becoming buddha. The *Srimaladevi-simhanada* even narrates that Buddha was learning from Lady Malyasri. With the development of Pure Land Buddhism, it is taught that there is no distinction between male and female in the Pure Land.<sup>41</sup>

Indian Buddhism teaches that there is equality between male and female, father and son, husband and wife, master and slave. They should respect one another and treat one another freely. This is different from post-Han Confucian teaching of subservience and subordination. In order to gain room to exist and develop, early Buddhists had to compromise with Confucian ethical teachings in their translation of the sutras. Hence Chinese Buddhism, in making its debut, dampens its teaching on husband's responsibility toward his wife, but highlights the subservience and dependence of a wife. This is an important characteristic of Chinese Buddhist ethical teachings.<sup>42</sup>

The *Sigalovada Suttanta* outlines that the attitudes of a husband toward his wife should be like this: courteous, not contemptuous, faithful, trusting her with authority and providing for her necessary adornment. In return, a wife should help the husband in managing house work wisely, treating relatives earnestly, being faithful, diligent, and caring for the husband's fortune.<sup>43</sup> But after

the compromise with Confucianism, Buddhist ethics adopts the concept of man being superior to woman. The Chinese translation of *Six-direction Rites* (*Liu Fang Li Ji*) changes five teachings on the virtue of equality to that of male superiority, that the wife has to serve and be obedient to the husband.<sup>44</sup>

Taoism teaches that everything is originated, contained, transformed and sustained by the *Tao*. As this *Tao* is unbiased, everything is ontologically equal.<sup>45</sup> However, Taoism follows Confucian ethics on their discriminatory teachings concerning women.<sup>46</sup>

## **B. Egalitarian Teaching on Women**

The oppression of women by traditional culture mainly comes from its constraints on ethics and social role. And these constraints, such as the "Three Principles," "Three Obedience," "Man outside, women inside," have their origin in the teaching of rites (*li*).<sup>47</sup>

Let us analyze the significance of rites in Chinese culture. Chinese culture regards the world and society as an organic entity, harmonious and orderly. Man and woman are mutually complementary and supporting.<sup>48</sup> The purpose of assigning definite roles to each one in personal relationship (king and courtiers, father and son, husband and wife) is that these roles be kept for social harmony and order.



*The Book of Rites (Li Ji)* stresses the mutually supporting relationship between male and female, and neither one can be dismissed. "Thus the relationship between the king and the queen is like that between the sun and the moon, *yang* and *yin*; the two must be together."<sup>49</sup> It also teaches, "The king studies man's teaching, while the queen learns woman's obedience. The king manages the *yang* matters, while the queen cares for the *yin* virtues. The king governs external affairs, while the queen looks after internal affairs. As the teaching and the obedience are kept, the external and the internal affairs are in order, the country is well governed, then there will be prosperity." Here woman's constraint is called "woman's obedience," and the king is ruled by man's teaching. When everybody follows the rule, the nation is well governed.<sup>50</sup>

This pursuit for order can be traced back to Confucius. Facing a world of social disorder and moral disintegration, he advocates a restoration of the rites to re-establish social order.<sup>51</sup> What he means by rites is not the superficial ceremony, but he demands a deep reflection into the meaning and spirit underneath, which is *ren*.<sup>52</sup>

It has been commonly agreed that *ren* is the central theme in Confucius' thinking.<sup>53</sup> *Ren* is the basis of the rites (*li*),<sup>54</sup> and the rites can be seen as the manifestation of *ren* in specific social circumstances, subject to change over time.<sup>55</sup>

Therefore, the relationship between the king and his courtiers, father and son, husband and wife should not be that of stereotyped obedience, but is guided by *ren*. If the demands of the king, the father and the husband are against *ren*, then the courtiers, the son and the wife can disobey. Thus the *Yen's Family Teachings* explicitly says, "Ethical cultivation begins with the elder and senior, to be followed by the younger and junior. If the father is not kind, the son will not be filial; if the elder brother is not friendly, the younger brother will not respect; if the husband is not faithful, the wife will not be obedient."

The different demands on different roles cannot be regarded as unfair, as these demands are all under the principle of *ren*. The different demands are adaptations to contemporary social situations, and are subject to change; though the principle of *ren* remains unchanged.

Mu Zhongsan points out that Confucianism affirms life through the praxis of morality, which begins with the self and extends to others.<sup>56</sup> Lao Siguang shows that the basic meaning of *ren* is to treat others as oneself and to get rid of one's selfishness.<sup>57</sup> Book XII of the *Analects* narrates that "Fan Chi asked about *ren*, and Confucius answered, 'Love others.' " That means, *ren* is to love everybody, not ignoring any individual.<sup>58</sup> It is also said that "*Ren* is the submission of the self to the restoration of *li*." One should restrain one's personal desire and walk according to moral

precepts,<sup>59</sup> beginning with oneself and extending to others. Thus Book VI says, "*Ren* is to establish oneself and then establish other, to achieve one's goal and then help others to achieve. Learn from those near you--such is the way of *ren*." Again Book XII, "Do not do to others that you don't want to be done to yourself."

So *ren* is a precept on selfless moral acts through empathetic consideration of the desire of others, requiring the doer to be a moral being. The system of rites is only a tool for the realization of *ren*, subject to the change of time.<sup>60</sup>

To Confucius, everybody is equal in nature and value,<sup>61</sup> which are inborn. The *Doctrine of the Mean (Zhong Rong)* states, "*Ren* is human nature, showing itself most clearly in the benevolence toward family members." Thus *ren* is the basic element of human beings.<sup>62</sup> Again it says, "Human nature is bestowed from heaven."<sup>63</sup> So people are born equal, as each is bestowed a nature of *ren*. This is in line with Confucius' idea that "everybody can become a sage." This is the most important and fundamental equality; affirmation of this equality is the affirmation of all kinds of equality.<sup>64</sup>

Buddha was born in a time when women's status was low, but he broke away from the tradition in stating that everybody has buddha nature, and that male and female are equal wise, and all can become buddha.<sup>65</sup> In praxis, this means that every living being, male or female, possesses by nature the potential of being awakened

and self-fulfilled.<sup>66</sup>

Ancient texts reveal that Taoist cosmology is *yin*-predominant.<sup>67</sup> Laoze's thought was based on *guicang*, and was enriched through the writings of Zhuangze, Lieze and Huainanze to comprise the basic texts of Taoism after the Han dynasty. Of these texts, the *Tao Te Ching* is the most fundamental and widely used.<sup>68</sup>

According to Wang Bi's commentary, the *Tao Te Ching* places *yin* before *yang*, reflecting Laoze's thought of emphasizing *yin* more than *yang*. Although the word "carrying *yin* to embrace *yang*" is mentioned only once in the *Tao Te Ching*, it is in fact the basic premise throughout the book.<sup>69</sup>

Taoist folk religion also has the aspect of showing respect to females. This can be seen from its worship of goddesses.<sup>70</sup> This a worship of females spread among the populace and forms various kinds of legends, such as the worship of the Spinster Maid on the seventh night of the seventh month, the legend of *Bixia Yuanjun*, and the Heavenly Empress.<sup>71</sup>

Folk tradition has many times highlighted the glorious side of the female. The buddha *Guanyin* was originally masculine in India, but was gradually transformed into feminine in China, becoming a symbol of mercy and deliverance, a sign of the feminine nature of being merciful.<sup>72</sup> From this we can see the acceptance and



adoration of folk Buddhism of female bodhisattvas.

If we accept the ideas mentioned above and try to understand from a different perspective those teachings discriminatory to women, we will find that they can have different interpretations.

The words in the *Analects* that "women and the vulgar are difficult to get along with" can be taken as an expression of Confucius' own negative experience in dealing with women and the vulgar.<sup>73</sup> They were difficult to be dealt with, not because of their intrinsic nature, which is similar in everybody, but because of their upbringing. This is what is said in the same Book XVII of the *Analects* that "by nature everyone is similar, but each one differs in what they learn."<sup>74</sup>

According to *Perspectives on Chinese Women Culture* by Hu Kun, it is a historical misunderstanding to take "playing jade" and "playing porcelain" as sexual discrimination. The original meaning of this ancient custom does not have any sense of sexual discrimination, as was misinterpreted in later time. Jade was a stony tool for earning a living, while porcelain was a tool for weaving. In olden days, jade was not more precious than porcelain; they differed only in their role, not in status.<sup>75</sup>

According to early Taoist texts, "bedroom arts" is not a way to exploit women as tools for the nourishing of the male with feminine essence. It teaches normal sexual intercourse between husband and

wife, not sexual promiscuity. Its effect is said to be mutual nourishment between *yin* and *yang*, with the purpose of edifying both sexes. That is why this "bedroom arts" has been practiced by both male and female.<sup>76</sup>

## **C. Egalitarian Ethics**

Early ethical teachings concerning the relationship of women to fathers, husbands and sons can be understood as protective to women under those social circumstances. Thanks to the selfishness of some men who wanted to sustain their lineage and rule, and the political ambition of some kings who wanted to maintain their authority and privilege, the relationship of mutual concern and cooperation was twisted into one between the respected and the humble, noble and common, high and low. As economy, knowledge and military power were in the hands of the kings and their ministers, they had every right to interpret Chinese culture in the way they wanted, thus formulating a traditional feudalistic culture antagonistic to women.

### **1. Social Ethics**

The concept that "male governs external affairs and female internal affairs" was developed because the socio-economic structure of ancient society was based on small-scale agriculture. Manual labour was in demand, and, as men are physically stronger than

women, men naturally became responsible for external affairs, while women took care of the family and the children. But when these gender roles were moralized into ethical precepts, social activities of women were restricted, and they were barred from society, education and politics.<sup>77</sup> This was an unhealthy development of the concept, but not its original intention.

The saying "an unlearned woman is virtuous" was a remark made under specific situational limitations. According to *Chinese Historical Feminine Exemplar* edited by Yin Yuchuan, ancient Chinese women treasured both learning and virtue. Famous figures like Jingjiang, Banzhao, Tiying, Xunguan are all well-learned and virtuous women.<sup>78</sup> This shows that women can be both learned and virtuous.

The notion that "an unlearned woman is virtuous" was developed when some Confucian scholars lamented over their own misfortune caused by their great learning. Due to their sense of responsibility and commitment to society, they had to shoulder their burden for the family and the nation, and they could not give up their learning. But for a woman without the opportunity and need for work in society, there was no need for them to be educated. Out of their sympathy toward the unfortunate women, they advocated the notion that "unlearned women is virtuous."<sup>79</sup>

Not a small number of learned scholars in Chinese history have



also criticized the teachings in Chinese culture like "women bring troubles" or "beauty brings destructions to a nation." They taught that those sayings were made up by unenlightened confucians trying to please the kings by putting the blame of national destruction on women, thus acquitting the kings and the ministers. Thus it is said, "The establishment of a nation depends on whether there are virtuous people. What has this to do with gender?" Lu Kun also says, "A women can be virtuous or vicious, but she cannot bring calamities. Disaster only comes from those base and incapable men who indulge in love."<sup>80</sup>

## 2. Family Ethics

The traditional interpretations of the "Three Principles," and "Three Obedience and Four Virtues" to glorify kings and male and humble courtiers and female were only flatteries made by some courtiers to please their kings. In fact the emphasis of Confucianism is on the moderation of roles, so that everybody can play his or her part well. If one side deserts his or her responsibility, the other side cannot be held accountable.

*The Book of Rites (Li Ji)* has listed the regulations and restrictions on the demeanour of people of different ranks, applicable to both husband and wife, male and female. The husband has his regulations, the wife has hers. Thus *Zuo Zhuan* states, "The king should be just, courtiers faithful, father kind, son filial, elder brother

virtuous, younger brother respecting." This is called "the six norms." Again, "Husband should be gracious, wife tender, mother-in-law kind, daughter-in-law obedient." Here equality between husband and wife is clearly indicated. It will not be against the Confucian spirit to state that both husband and wife have to fulfill their own roles, just like the king, the courtiers, the father and the son each has their own roles to fulfill. These restrictions on human relationship are for both sides to keep, and are not limitations on merely one side.<sup>81</sup>

Actually the "Three Obedience" have not been completely put into practice in Chinese society. Even though a woman is subordinate to her husband, she may have a very high status if she is a senior. Not only does she have the power to treat her children and daughters-in-law in the way she likes, she may even be able to influence the emperor as his mother.<sup>82</sup> Affiliation to the son after the husband's death cannot usually be seen as an oppression in Chinese tradition; it is in fact a way of taking care of the mother. Filial piety is strongly emphasized in Confucianism, so the son is usually very respectful toward the mother, striving to comfort the mother's hardship with one's own success.<sup>83</sup>

The following two aspects are upheld in popular tradition:

1) Couples should stay together until death, with loyalty and chastity. The opera "Wang Baochuan" praises Wang's

faithfulness to her marriage; another opera "Execution of Chen Shimei" condemns the evil deeds of Chen, the top candidate in the national scholarly examination, who, after being appointed as a high official and marrying the princess, dismissed and murdered his first wife and children. These two operas were very popular, Wang was respected, Chen despised.<sup>84</sup>

2) Couples should live harmoniously, faithfully and trustingly. This is the kind of relationship praised in olden days, as it is said, "Rain falls with the harmony of *yin* and *yang*; a family prospers with the harmony of husband and wife." "The harmony between husband and wife is like that between harp and lute." All these stress the cooperative and complementary relationship between husbands and wives.<sup>85</sup>

The "Seven Rules for Divorce" were originally intended to protect women,<sup>86</sup> because men, following their weak human nature, had divorced wives as they wished. Furthermore, there are in ancient texts "Three Rules forbidding Divorce," so that divorce could not be easily done.<sup>87</sup> Thus it can be seen that these ancient regulations were intended to protect women. Before the Song dynasty (960 A.D.-1279 A.D.), women could divorce and remarry at will, without any restrictions.<sup>88</sup> It is only after the Song that feudalistic rites gradually developed, and women lost their decisive power in marriage.



As a whole, Chinese culture possesses the foundation for sexual equality. Confucianism stresses that society is an organic entity, and man is an ethical being. Everybody can be Yao and Shun. *Ren* is central in ethics. Taoism is a *yin*-predominant philosophy, advocating worship of goddesses. Buddhism also teaches sexual equality; those discriminatory sayings are only distortions and exaggerations of Chinese culture.

## Concluding Comments

To conclude, traditional culture has put two constraints on women: 1) Women have been unfairly treated by the customs and the social structure. 2) Women have been understood as the weaker sex, taking a subordinate role, thus shaping a low self-esteem for them. However, there are not only restrictive teachings in Chinese culture. When traced to their origins, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism all teach sexual equality. Chinese culture depicts society as an organic entity, with male and female in different roles, cooperating and complementing one another to the building up of a harmonious and orderly society. Thus we should affirm Chinese culture, and not eradicate the traditions of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, lest we become a rootless generation. What we should do is to search for the new roles of male and female in the contemporary social context, to re-develop the self-esteem of women, and to construct together our family and society.

Though there is the aspect of equality in Chinese culture, it has neglected the improvement of the social situation and structure. Hence an equalitarian society cannot be developed. In the second chapter, we will see that significant results have been obtained after the liberation as the Chinese government endeavours to construct an equalitarian social structure.



## Chapter Notes

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<sup>1</sup>Confucianism sprouted in the chaotic situation of the periods of "Spring and Autumn" and of the Warlords (722 B.C. - 221 B.C.). Confucius advocates the resumption of rites, believing that society can only be stabilized when man acts as an ethical being by following the rites. So confucianism stresses ethical teaching, as well as the stability of country, society and family, and was hence accepted by the rulers and became the culture of the scholars. Zhang Desheng points out that traditional culture was developed under the passion for order, so Buddhism and Taoism were no rivals with Confucianism since they take the construction of social order as their ultimate concern. See Zhang Desheng, *Confucian Ethics and the Passion for Order: Social Interpretation of Chinese Thought* (Taipei: Big Stream Books, 1989), pp. 199-204.

<sup>2</sup>Taoism can be traced back to an ancient Chinese primordial religion, and was formulated as a school of philosophy by Laoze. Zhang Ling institutionalized Taoism in late Han dynasty (25 A.D. - 220 A.D), with structured hierarchy, rituals and dioceses. Absorbing folk religions, Taoism became respected for its mission of miraculous healing and exorcism, and Laoze was revered as its originator. The development of Taoism follows three different routes: 1. Nourishing of life -- through the art of meditation, and the

preparation of life pills and longevity potions, which were so expensive that only kings and rich people could afford them. To the populace, Taoism attracts through healing, funeral, fortune telling and arts of health. Bedroom arts has also been a way to nourish life, available to all, rich and poor. 2. Nurturing of mind -- through the philosophy of Laoze and Zhuangze, teaching a quietistic union between nature and man. This catered most to unsuccessful scholars and hermits. 3. Folk religion -- cultivating a world view of gods and demons, judgement and the search for peace. See Julia Ching & Hans Kung, *Christianity and Chinese Religions* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1989), pp.114-136.

<sup>3</sup>Buddhism came to China in the first century A.D., and was at first not accepted by Confucians and Taoists. Tonsuring was seen as harming the body begotten from parents; monasticism was taken as against filial piety; vegetarianism was considered to be rejecting ancestral worship. Nevertheless, there were some common grounds between Buddhism and Taoism, such as the strong metaphysical natures of both and their cultivation through meditation. Later Buddhists exploited Taoist concepts and terminology for the translation of their sutras, and their teachings received greater acceptance. As their religious formalities were quite similar to those of Taoism, the two gradually merged together, especially to the populace, as a folk religion of gods and demons.



The merger is so complete that they often share common gods. Later, Buddhism also borrowed Confucian ethics as their way of cultivation. See *ibid.*, pp. 175-180.

<sup>4</sup>Zhang Desheng, *ibid.*, p.201.

<sup>5</sup>Peter L. Berger's religious social theory has been employed here. He points out that society is a product of human beings. When man makes impact on society through his thinking and action, this process is called externalization. When human thinking is externalized into social thinking, customs and structures, these become independent from man and confront their creators. This process is called objectivization. When the objective world makes impact upon man and becomes man's subjective thinking, this process is called internalization. See Peter L. Berger, *Holy Tabernacle: Elements of Religious Social Theory*, trans. Gao Shiling (Shanghai: People's Publishing, 1991), pp.8-9.

<sup>6</sup>This is the process of externalization. *Ibid.*, pp.3-16.

<sup>7</sup>This is the process of objectivization. *Ibid.*, pp.16-36.

<sup>8</sup>This is the process of internalization. *Ibid.*, pp.37-96.

<sup>9</sup>Liu Dalin, ed., *Chinese Ancient Sex Culture*, vol. 1 (Lingxia: People's Publishing, 1993), p.368.

<sup>10</sup>*Sastra on the Prajna-paramita Sutra* points out that women have many weaknesses and one should not be too intimate with them. The *King Udayana Sutra* states, "Women are the most evil and it is difficult to have them awakened. If you fall in love with them, you are seduced into sin." See Wen Jiehua, "Confucianism and Chinese Women," *Tripod* vol. 77 (1993), pp.6-7.

<sup>11</sup>*Ekottaragama* points out, "Don't have anything to do with women, nor even talk to them. If you can get away from them, you are far from the eight sufferings." The Hinayana *Lotus Sutra* says that women have five hindrances, and cannot become buddha. See Shi Yongming, *Buddhist Teachings on Women* (Taipei: Buddhist Light, 1990), p.4, and Li Yihua, "Buddhist Response to Women's Changing Roles," *Shi* vol. 7 (1992), p.2.

<sup>12</sup>Ancient people saw it as disastrous for women to be beautiful or powerful. Traditional ethics stresses the distinction between the sexes, and that women cannot assume the position of men. Women cannot get involved with politics, nor can the queen and the concubines seduce the king. Officials, attempting to desert their political responsibility, shaped figures like Meixi, Tanji, Baosi, Liji and Xiaji into the classical mould of beautiful women bringing national destruction, and generalized it into the axiom that a beautiful woman is a national disaster. It was said in the Han

dynasty that natural catastrophes related to the change of the moon, stars, thunder, hail, landslide, storm, etc. were all caused by women's interference in politics. Women's political influence is hence eradicated. In the Three-Kingdoms period (80 A.D. - 220 A.D.), Cheng Xiao teaches in his "Women Classics" that talented and beautiful women are ominous signs, bringing destruction to family and nation. Talented women can only be helpers to men, otherwise it would be as disastrous as the crowing of a hen. See Liu Yongchong, *Women and History: A New Study into Chinese Traditional Concepts* (Hong Kong: Educational Books, 1993), pp.3-42.

<sup>13</sup>The "Three Principles" teaches that the king is the principle of the courtiers, father is the principle of the sons, and the husband is the principle of the wife. The subordinates should be submissive to the superiors. See Zhang Zhuo, *An Overview of Social Prescriptions: Lu Xun's Critique upon Traditional Culture* (Shanxi: People's Educational Press, 1991), pp.61-64.

<sup>14</sup>"Three obedience" refers to a woman's obedience to her father before marriage, to her husband after marriage, and to her son after the husband's death. A woman always has to be submissive. "Four Virtues" refers to a woman's conduct, speech, appearance and work. This means that a woman has to be specially trained with respect to demeanour, speaking, style and handicraft, in order to

become a virtuous wife and mother. See Wen Jiehua, *ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>15</sup>Wu Qing, "The Impact of Reforms on Women in China," in *Black Cat, White Cat*, ed. Theresa C. Carino & Aileen S. P. Baviera (Manila: China Development Resource Centre, 1993), p.24.

<sup>16</sup>Huang Huiying, "Confucian Perspective on Women Status," *Shi* vol.7 (1992), p.5. The Book of Rites reports that a girl begins at an age of ten to receive education from female teachers on the manner of speaking, sewing and cooking. See Wen Jiehua, *ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>17</sup>"The Four Books for Women" were four teaching materials for the education of the virtuous wife and mother in ancient China. They consist of *Women's Codes, Discourse on Women, Instructions on Family affairs and Exemplars of Virtuous Women*.

<sup>18</sup>Ma Xinlai, ed., *Brilliant Women* (Hong Kong: China Press, 1992), pp.39-45.

<sup>19</sup>According to early texts such as *The Rites of Zhou* and *The Book of Rites*, the "Four Virtues" were the education a noble woman should have. Later these four virtues became the norm for an ideal woman. But still later, there was increasing opposition to women's literacy. It was advocated that "women should not be allowed to study books and history," "women should only know several hundred



words related to living," "women should not learn literature." There were indeed some who allowed their daughters to study, but the conservatives usually restricted their education to sewing, filial rites, and women virtues. Hence the distinction of "woman's learning" from "man's learning," limited to the teaching of books such as *Women Teachings* and *Stories of Virtuous Women*. See Liu Yongchong, *ibid.*, pp.92-93.

<sup>20</sup>The encouragement for women to study literary works had never been a lonely voice, though the opposition was also not weak. There were even dilemmas in the minds of educated women, as is revealed in the poem of Zhu Shuzhen, "It is a sin for women to write, not to say to compose poems. It is our business to sew with needles, but not to write with pens." Also, "I study poems when I have nothing else to do, and I find that the poems only talks about the sadness of departure." *Ibid.*, p.93.

<sup>21</sup>Feng Menglong, *Collections of Wisdom*, Ming Dynasty (1368 A.D.-1644 A.D.): "A man being virtuous is educated; a woman with no education is virtuous." The same is collected in Chen Jiru, *So the Elderly Say*. *Ibid.*, p.89.

<sup>22</sup>There is an old saying that "The hen does not crow in the morning. If the hen does crow in the morning, destruction will come to the family." *The Book of Poetry* of late Western Zhou

dynasty (1066 B.C. - 771 B.C.) also has the saying that "Wise men establish the city; wise women destroy the city." Again *Zhou Yi* states that "The correct position of a woman is inside the family; that of a man is outside the family." Ibid., pp.61-63.

<sup>23</sup>The "Seven Rules" are the seven reasons for which a man can divorce his wife, as is recorded in *The Book of Rites*. They are: barrenness, adultery, disrespect of parents-in-law, wicked tongue, theft, jealousy, and heinous disease. See Zheng Huisheng, "On the Seven Rules," ed. Li Xiaojang, *Puzzles about Chinese Women* (Beijing: Joint Publishing, 1990), p.80.

<sup>24</sup>Following Mencius' saying "Three things are considered to be non-filial; of these, the greatest is to be without offspring," the practice of getting concubines for offspring gradually becomes normative family ethics. See Wen Jiehua, *ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>25</sup>See *The Book of Rites*, "A women cannot have saving, cannot take or give without the consent of the parents." Thus a woman cannot give any of her husband's properties to anyone, nor can she easily get out to work. Her dowry belongs to her husband, and she does not have any right to an inheritance. Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Dong Zhongshu of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.-23 A.D.) combined Confucianism with Taoist cosmology, explicating *Yin*



*Yang* as "Husband is *yang*, wife is *yin*. *Yang* is strong and *yin* is weak. So husband is chief, wife is assistant." It is a heavenly principle for woman to be subservient to man. Ibid., p.5.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p.4.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid. Dong Zhongshu uses Confucianism as the main line in combining the teachings of various schools, including the school of law (*Fajia*). He modifies the cosmology of the *Yin Yang* school to formulate his five-elements cosmology, which teaches that everything is ordered hierarchically according to the principle of *yang*. It is hence normative to have the hierarchy of king and courtiers, father and son, husband and wife. "*Yang* is superior to *yin*, such is the heavenly structure." He further invests value judgement upon this universally present *yin yang*, so that "*yin* is low, *yang* is high," "*yang* is precious, *yin* is cheap," "*yin* is evil, *yang* is good," "smooth is *yang*, rough is *yin*," "the top is good and the bottom evil," etc. "The king is commissioned by heaven, the son by the father, and the wife from the husband." Thus everything is predestined and unalterable. See Zhang Zhuo, *ibid.*, pp.61-64.

<sup>29</sup>The influence of religion can be good or bad. Here we only discuss the dark side.

<sup>30</sup>Aprakov, *Religious Social Science* (Sichuan: People's

Publishing, 1989), p.121. The author calls this phenomenon the compensatory function of religion.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p.120. The author calls this phenomenon the world-view function of religion.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., pp.120-121. This is a combination of the compensatory and world-view functions of religion.

<sup>33</sup>Ge Zhaoguang, *Taoism and Chinese Culture* (Shanghai: People's Publishing, 1987), p.252.

<sup>34</sup>Li Jingzhi, *Marxist View of Women* (Beijing: Chinese People University, 1992), pp.2-9.

<sup>35</sup>Liu Yongchong, *ibid.*, p.61.

<sup>36</sup>Li Jingzhi, *ibid.*, pp.10-17.

<sup>37</sup>Wen Jiehua, *ibid.*, p.10.

<sup>38</sup>Li Yihua, *ibid.*, p.2

<sup>39</sup>Shi Yongming, *ibid.*, pp.2-3.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.173-174.

<sup>41</sup>Li Yihua, *ibid.*, pp.2-3.

<sup>42</sup>Fang Litien, *Chinese Buddhism and Traditional Culture* (Taipei: Guiguan Books, 1994), pp.279-284.

<sup>43</sup>H. Saddhatissa, *Buddhist Ethics*, trans. Yao Zhihua (Taipei: Dawn, 1993), p.159.

<sup>44</sup>Fang Litien, *ibid.*, p.279.

<sup>45</sup>Cheng Zhongying, "Characteristics of Chinese Philosophy," ed. Xiang Weixin et al., *Essays on Chinese Philosophical Thoughts--Prologue* (Taipei: Shepherd, 1979), pp.77-78.

<sup>46</sup>Taoist ethics mainly follows Confucianism, stressing a class structure of loyalty, filial piety, benevolence and righteousness. See Zhan Shichuang, *Taoism and Women* (Shanghai: Ancient Classics, 1990), p.90. See also Ge Zhaoguang, *ibid.*, pp.241-242.

<sup>47</sup>"Rites" can be distinguished into a narrow sense of ceremonial rites and a broad sense of hierarchical rites. The former is popular rites, while the latter is theoretical rites, referring mainly to the social structure. See Lao Siguang, *History of Chinese Philosophy* vol.1 (Hong Kong: Union, 1981), p.40.

<sup>48</sup>Cheng Zhongying, *ibid.*, pp.93-95.

<sup>49</sup>Huang Huiying, *ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup>Zhang Desheng points out that this pursuit for order has become a passion in Chinese culture. See Zhang, *ibid.*, pp.76-77, 158-159.

<sup>52</sup>Huang Huiying, *ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>53</sup>Lao Siguang, *ibid.*, p.52. See also Liu Zhen, *Essence of Confucian Ethical Teachings* (Taibei: Zhengzhung, 1987), p.46.

<sup>54</sup>Confucius says, "Without *ren*, how can one practice rites? Without *ren*, how can one practice music?" From this saying, Lao Siguang points out that *ren* is the basis for rites. Lao Siguang, *ibid.*, p.52.

<sup>55</sup>Du Weiming, *Human Nature and Self-cultivation* (Taibei: Lienjing, 1992), p.13.

<sup>56</sup>Mu Zhongsan, *The Nature of Chinese Philosophy* (Taibei: Students Books, 1963), p.15.

<sup>57</sup>Lao Siguang, *ibid.*, p.47.

<sup>58</sup>Xie Youwei, "Position of the Individual in the Ethics of Confucius," ed. Xiang Weixin et al., *Essays on Chinese Philosophical Thoughts--Pre-Qin Period* (Taibei: Shepherd, 1976), p.78.

<sup>59</sup>Tan Chenggeng, *A Study on the Analects and Mencius* (Hunan: Educational Press, 1990), pp.22-23.

<sup>60</sup>Huang Huiying, *ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>61</sup>Human beings here certainly include both male and female. See Tan Chenggeng, *ibid.*, pp.23-24.

<sup>62</sup>Xie Youwei, *ibid.*, pp.78-79.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, p.78.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.80-81.

<sup>65</sup>Shi Yongming, *ibid.*, pp.173-174.

<sup>66</sup>Liao Fengming, "Chinese Women and Family in Buddhist Tradition," *Tripod* vol.77 (1993), p.12.

<sup>67</sup>The dialectics of *yin-yang* has been the basic premise of

ancient Chinese thinking, but there has not been any consensus to this issue among different schools. This phenomenon existed as early as in the Zhou dynasty (1066 - 771 B.C.). According to the *Book of Zhou Rites*, ancient ministers owned three books of changes, all on fortune telling based on the concept of *yin-yang*. *Lianshan* begins with the sign of *gen*, denoting mountain; *guicang* begins with the sign of *kun*, denoting earth, in which is hidden the nature; *Zhouyi* begins with the sign of *qian*, denoting heaven, which everything adores. See Zhan Shichuang, *ibid.*, pp.14-15.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, p.47.

<sup>69</sup>In *Tao Te Ching*, Laoze always relates *Tao* to mother nature. *Tao* is the mother of all existence. Water is weak in nature, but no strong things can overcome it. Water is opposite to fire. Fire is *yang*; water is *yin*. Deducing from this, the weak is *yin*, the strong is *yang*. Laoze's advocacy of the function of water and the overcoming of the strong with the weak is a clear indication of his *yin*-predominant thinking. *Ibid.*, pp.46-47.

<sup>70</sup>From linguistics, scholars find out that early communities were feminine-centred, with women as tribal leaders, inherited by women. When the leaders passed away, they entered the array of gods to become undying goddesses. Among them the earliest and the most powerful was *Nu Wo*, who created heaven and earth and



was omnipotent. Ibid., pp.10-15, 54-60.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., pp.54-60.

<sup>72</sup>Liao Fengming, *ibid.*, p.12. See also Shi Yongming, *ibid.*, p.174.

<sup>73</sup>Wang Xiangrong, ed., *Twenty Lectures on the Analects* vol.2 (Taibei: China Books, 1958), p.226.

<sup>74</sup>Liang Zhengting, *A Commentary and Modern Translation on the Analects* (Shanghai: Shanghai Press, 1987), p.279.

<sup>75</sup>Huang Yianli, *Women and Chinese Culture* (Hong Kong: Education Books, 1994), pp.54-55

<sup>76</sup>Zhan Shichuang, *ibid.*, pp.112-114.

<sup>77</sup>Women could be politically involved in the period of Western Zhou (1066 B.C.-771 B.C.). It is recorded that one of the ten deputy ministers of king Wu in his revolution against king Zhou was his mother Taiqi. See Liu Yongchong, *ibid.*, p.61.

<sup>78</sup>Yin Yuchuan, *Chinese Historical Feminine Exemplar* (Taichung: Guangqi, 1983) pp.11-12.

<sup>79</sup>Liu Yongchong, *ibid.*, pp.89-97.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., pp.49-51.

<sup>81</sup>Huang Huiying, *ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p.5.

<sup>83</sup>Xiong Bingzheng, "Mother-son relationship in the Ming-Qing families: sex, affection and others," ed. Li Xiaojiang, *Gender and China* (Beijing: Joint Publishing, 1994), p.514.

<sup>84</sup>Zhizhu, ed. *Discourse on Chinese Traditional Philosophy* (Shandong: Qi-Lu Books, 1992), pp.292-294.

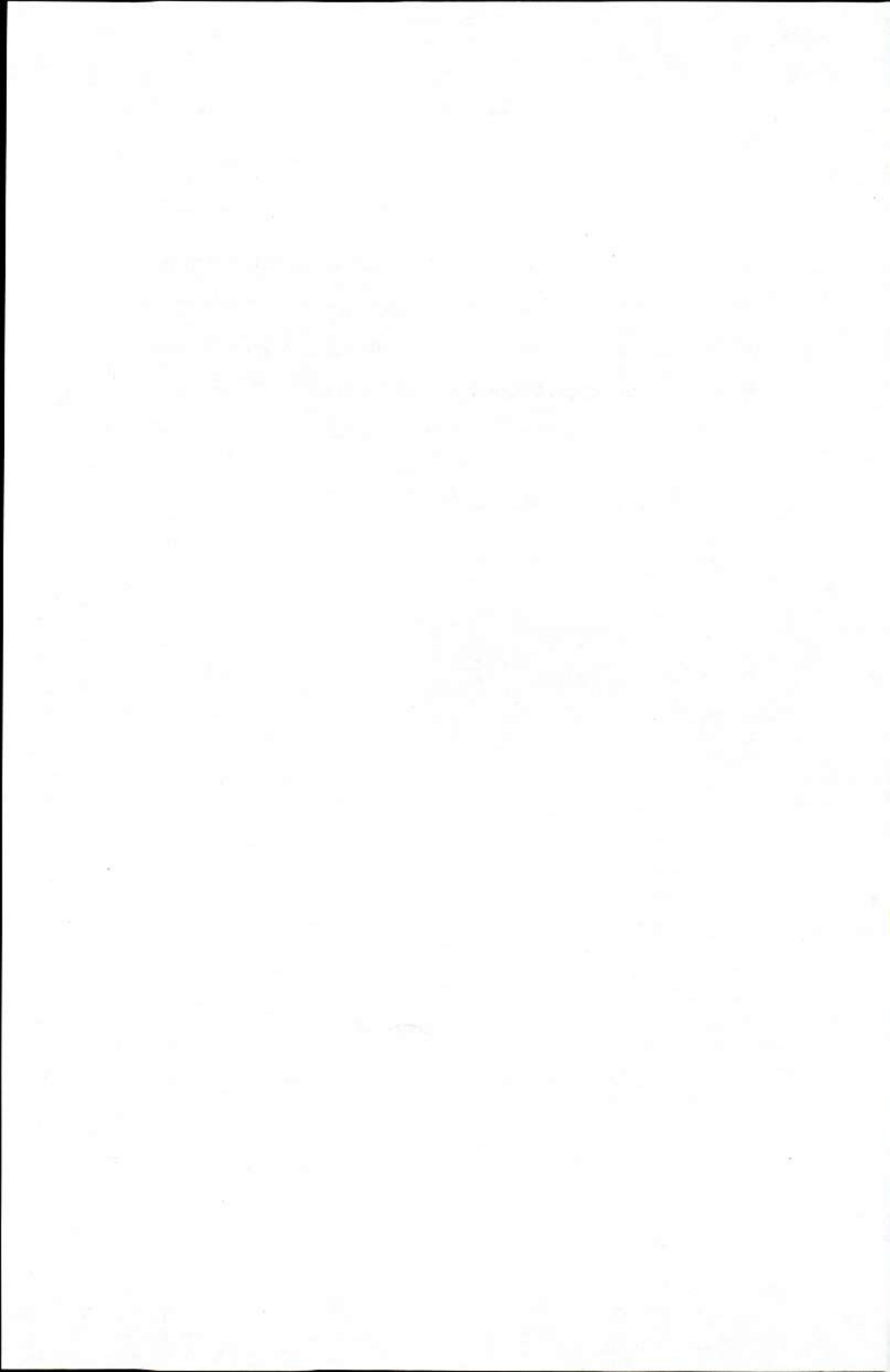
<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

<sup>86</sup>Husbands could divorce wives as they wished before the Qin dynasty (221 B.C.-206 B.C.). Wives could do nothing but to leave home with tears, having no place to appeal. After the "Seven Rules" became the custom, husbands could not divorce for other reasons, and wives had a basis for appeal. Therefore the historical significance of the "Seven Rules" is not defending husbands' power in oppressing women, but in limiting their freedom to the seven rules. These rules could then be used as an oppressive weapon as well as a kind of self-defence. See Zheng Huisheng, *ibid.*, pp.77-86.

<sup>87</sup>Together with the earlier record of the "Seven Rules for

Divorce,” there were also the “Three Rules forbidding Divorce.” These are: “When a woman has no place to go, divorce is forbidden. When a woman has kept three years’ funeral rites for her in-laws, divorce is forbidden. When a woman has stayed with her husband through poverty to richness, divorce is forbidden.” Ibid., pp.86-87.

<sup>88</sup>Zhang Zhuo, *ibid.*, pp.61-67.



## **Chapter Two**

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### **Women in Contemporary Chinese Society**

## Introductory Comments

This chapter focuses on the study of the situation of women in China after 1949.<sup>1</sup> But before this time there had already been numerous learned people advocating sexual equality. After the Opium War in 1840, China was challenged by western thinking and technology, and society suffered drastic changes. People began to be concerned about the issue of sexual equality. The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, being influenced by Christian thought, became the pioneer of the Chinese women's movement, organizing peasant women to resist oppression. Hong Xiuquan regarded men and women as his brothers and sisters, and fought for their equality.<sup>2</sup>

After that, Liang Qichao and his teacher Kang Youwei pushed for reform, forbidding foot-binding, and running schools for women. Many newspapers for women appeared at the same time.<sup>3</sup> In the period of Sun Yat Sen's revolution, some women's organizations showed their care and contribution to the country in fighting courageously for the people.<sup>4</sup>

In the early days of the Republic, some twenty women petitioned for women's rights in voting and election, but they were rejected. Some conservative parties advocated enhancement of women's political awareness, organizing a women's university of law, and publishing a women's republican paper. Due to their loose connection and the lack of a vision of national political



involvement, they were quieted down when Yuan Shikai assumed power.<sup>5</sup>

During the May Fourth Movement, advocates of new cultural movement analyzed women's liberation in the light of the entire cultural background, and made rational and in-depth studies on the issue of human rights. Hu Shi advocated a progress beyond the concept of women acting as virtuous wives and good mothers. Li Dachao believed that real democracy could only be realized with women's liberation. Chen Duxiu considered it proper in civilized society to have women participating in politics.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, women have joined in the revolution against warlords, and there began to be organized women's movement against imperialism and capitalism. In the late thirties, numerous members of the women's movements joined the communist movement.<sup>7</sup> In 1927, the communist party even issued a constitution in the Su area, Jiangxi, underscoring sexual equality.<sup>8</sup> But it is a pity that these were all isolated movements and not a wholistic reform led by the government. Limited in resources and influence, they did not have much impact on society.

After the liberation in 1949, the government has made improvements in the areas of employment, politics, education, law, marriage and family life.<sup>9</sup> A nation-wide women's federation<sup>10</sup> has been established to organize women around the country for mutual cooperation.<sup>11</sup> Laws have also been legislated enforcing sexual

equality. These actions are possible because Chinese reformers, based on Marxism, have seen the women's issue as an integral part of revolutionary theory, and women's liberation is seen as an indicator of the success of the revolution and social progress. It is also part and parcel of human liberation.<sup>12</sup>

The government believes the oppression of women originates from class oppression, which is in turn caused by the system of private ownership.<sup>13</sup> To realize women's liberation, Marx and Engels think it necessary to liberate women from the system of family slavery--women are still oppressed if family chores render them ignorant. Therefore women ought to be freed to join social production.<sup>14</sup> Mao Zedong pointed out explicitly in 1942 that the centre and orientation of the women's movement should be in the participation in social production.<sup>15</sup>

Women are faced with new difficulties as the economic structure is transforming and society drastically changing. As these difficulties are caused by an intertwining of cultural and economic factors, these have to be handled at the same time. In what follows we will discuss these socio-economic difficulties women are facing, with respect to employment, politics, education, law, family and marriage.

## Section One : Employment

The government strongly encourages employment of women, and provides them with working opportunities, thus enhancing their economic and social status. This is the government's contribution to women. According to the 1990 census, China has the highest employment rate in the world: 72% of female over age 15 are employed, compared to 86% of male at the same age group. And the growth rate of employment of women is higher than that of men.<sup>16</sup> The same census again shows that women's employment rate, compared to that of 1982, has increased by 27.3%, 6.42% more than that of men.<sup>17</sup> This definitely helps in raising the status of women.

Employment of women frees them from the traditional mode of economic dependence on men, and this is the basic condition for sexual equality. This is the fruit of more than four decades' endeavour in mainland China to encourage women to be socially involved, thus raising their economic status in family and society. Nevertheless, scholars do not think that an increase in employment rate will necessarily bring in sexual equality. Economic independence does not mean that people have attained conceptually a consensus of sexual equality. It takes a longer time to rectify a traditional prejudice.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, the high employment rate of women does not mean

that there has already been in China sexual equality in occupation. As in many other developing countries, there are problems in the employment structure of women. Women are generally employed as non-technical labour, with an income lower than that of men.<sup>19</sup>

From 1982 to 1990, the employment structure of women was in a state of meandering, without any significant progress.<sup>20</sup> According to the statistics of employment in 1990, 82.38% of employed women were in the first type of occupation (agriculture and fishery), while that of men was 72.83%. 9.61% of employed women were in the second type (industry), for men 14.31%. In the third type, women 8.01%, men 11.86%. This reveals that the ratio of women working in low-income jobs is higher than that of men.<sup>21</sup>

In fact, women were pushed to work in society mainly by the labour policy in the past. Before the disintegration of the commune, every adult member of the commune naturally became its labour. The policy of "working in the countryside" again absorbed the excess labour in the cities. Hence, masses of women joined the production force, but they were often involved only in simple manual labour without any special training. As a result, the level of education and technical training of women is still behind that of men.<sup>22</sup> In addition, there is the traditional belief that women are weaker intellectually and physically, and jobs are allocated under this presupposition. Therefore many women are still occupying low-income jobs.<sup>23</sup>



As China adopts reforms and an open-door policy, introducing the mechanism of market competition, Chinese women are faced with new opportunities and crises. The opportunity is that there is available in society more demand for intellectual labour, and they have a better chance to join society and develop.<sup>24</sup> Thus some women have the opportunity to exercise their economic talents in certain private or cooperating enterprises.<sup>25</sup> There are in these enterprises female entrepreneurs and manageresses, and in society female professors and governors, and they show outstanding learning and ability. But women also face crisis in this competition, because in general women have received less education and training than their counterparts,<sup>26</sup> and they are also burdened by the rearing of children. Thus men may have a better chance to win out in this competition.

We will analyze the new crisis of women in the cities, economic zones and villages respectively.

In the cities, jobs were allocated in the past by the government, and they were "iron rice bowls."<sup>27</sup> But now every company has to maintain the balance of their own budget, and the cost of production receives more consideration than sexual equality. Due to economic factors, many protections and benefits of female labour have been reduced, bringing in the problem of sexual inequality in salary scale as well as in promotion. In the eyes of managers, the production efficiency of women is lower than that of men, because they can take



long maternity leave and may apply for leave to take care of sick children. Thus when there is the need to cut down the number of employees, women are the first to be laid off. In times of recruitment, women are the last to be considered.<sup>28</sup>

Among the 37,000 unemployed in Guangzhou in the first six months of 1993, 20,000 were recently laid off, of which 54% were women. It is said that some companies refuse to employ women. According to a survey by the National Union of 660 company heads, only 5.3% are willing to employ women workers. 13 companies out of 44 in Harbin clearly indicate that they will not hire women.<sup>29</sup> Since 1987, the phenomenon of female graduates being rejected by recruiting units has happened in nearly all universities.<sup>30</sup> Female bachelor or master graduates cannot get suitable jobs, only because they are women who will bear children.<sup>31</sup>

Beside facing the problem of unemployment, women are advised to return home for the men have already earned enough to maintain the family, and children need the care of mothers.<sup>32</sup> This phenomenon becomes more and more popular,<sup>33</sup> obviously under the influence of the traditional concept of "men outside, women inside." Male and female are not given the same space and freedom of choice according to their talents and ability.

Some independent contractual companies have suspended women's jobs, giving them a definite proportion of their wages, and

many of their fringe benefits are reduced or canceled.<sup>34</sup> Companies in the towns of Zhejiang, Guangdong, Jiangsu and Shandong have been found violating governmental ordinance for the protection of female workers. They have not provided for the female workers rest rooms, common rooms for pregnant women, nor nursing rooms. A survey done by Guangdong general union reveals that 55% of female workers do not have indemnification against pregnancy.<sup>35</sup>

In order to get a job and improve their living standards, many women from inner provinces come a long way to search for jobs in the economic zones. But they have to suffer from various problems such as overtime work, low wages, poor working environments and sexual harassment. Some female workers have to share an apartment with ten other workers, and the factories do not provide any kitchen utilities.<sup>36</sup> Some of them work 14 hours a day, seven days a week. As many of them are non-contract labour, they are not entitled to any indemnification. Accidents happen easily, just like a factory fire in Guangdong in 1991 which claimed the lives of 80 female workers.<sup>37</sup> Some female workers are sexually harassed verbally or physically by their male partners or bosses, who may even ask for sex, threatening with dismissal or lowering of wages.<sup>38</sup>

In villages, women are suffering from over-work.<sup>39</sup> In 1978, the government implemented the system of contractual responsibility on agricultural production. Land was leased for revenue.<sup>40</sup> This system of contractual responsibility forces women and the elderly to

shoulder 60% to 80% of the farm work, and women have to do house work after farming. They are usually overworking without much rest, thus affecting their health. The insufficiency of medical care in the villages aggravates their situation.<sup>41</sup> This phenomenon is caused by the traditional concept of "men outside, women inside." Men go out to work in the cities, leaving women in the villages, taking care of the farmland and the children on the one hand, and retaining the rights of owning the land and the house on the other.<sup>42</sup>



Generally speaking, the employment rate of women has been greatly improved since the liberation. But their occupations are still mainly non-technical, and their salaries rather low. As the economy are becoming privatized, governmental policies find it more difficult to be implemented, and a series of social problems has evolved as a result of the intertwining of cultural<sup>43</sup> and social<sup>44</sup> factors. These problems include inequality in job allocation, heavy burden in house and farm work, factories dismissing female workers, forcing them to rest, reduction in benefits and protections, and the tendency of not employing women.

## Section Two : Politics

Early female politicians like Queen Lu of Han, Empress Wu of Tang and Empress Dowager Cixi of Qing were only exceptions, and cannot be said to represent women's involvement in politics in the modern sense. The awakening of women's political involvement began from the reform movement in the late Qing, when Chinese scholars objected against foot-binding, established schools for women and advocated sexual equality under the influence of western ideas of freedom, equality, human rights and love. A few female revolutionaries joined the Wuchang Revolt. Some women also participated in the May Fourth Movement.<sup>45</sup>

The Communist revolution began to raise the status of women, when the spouses of communists became actively involved in the revolution in the thirties.<sup>46</sup> Since 1949, the government has been actively promoting women's leadership, and more and more women get involved in politics and assume leading roles. A census in 1982 shows that 840,000 women were in leading positions, which grew to 1,326,000 in 1989 with an increase of 57%, compared to 40% growth of male leadership.<sup>47</sup>

Although there has been great progress compared to the situation before the liberation, women's involvement in politics has slightly declined in recent years due to the change of election from "fixed quota" to "differential quota."<sup>48</sup> Influenced by cultural bias, people have more choices and tend not to elect women. In 1983



21.2% of the representatives of People's Assembly were women, but in 1993, it was only 21.03%.<sup>49</sup>

Why do people tend not to elect women when there is the choice? There are three reasons.<sup>50</sup>

1) Historical reasons: Women have long been confined to the family, isolated from society and politics. Politics has become the privilege of men, and women's political involvement is discriminated against. Though male and female are said to be equal, women become decorations when it comes to election. Women are stereotyped as wives and mothers.

2) Intrinsic reasons: Traditional culture stresses that the obedience of women is a virtue, resulting in a low self-esteem among women. They are usually afraid of competition, and have a weak political awareness. This has always been a great hindrance to women's political involvement. Even if they can get away from sexual discrimination and be transformed from a passive to an active competitive mode under the conditions of sexual equality, they may lose because of their own psychological handicap.

3) Pragmatic reasons: China has never built up a basis or channel for the promotion of female cadres. Often it is on the eve of elections that the departments concerned become busy with searching for and recommendation of candidates. Thus the political ability of the nominees are often not as important as meeting



the requirement of political strategies. Model workers were elected in the sixties, revolutionaries in the seventies, experts in the eighties, plus the election of non-party members, objects for unification, etc. These elections that pay attention to form rather than to quality are detrimental to the success of women's political involvement.

Under the influence of the traditional culture of "men outside, women inside," people are generally convinced that politics is a male ground, and women are not interested in politics.

Thus we can see that in this political run men and women are beginning from different starting points. In order to have fair competition, it is necessary at this stage to adopt special policies. Therefore the Chinese government fixes the proportion of women involved in politics.<sup>51</sup>

But it is definitely insufficient to rely solely on government policies. The great difficulties are the weak political awareness of women in political participation, and the female politicians' weak sense of communal concept of women. Proportional allocation of female cadres according to established policy is only a political assistance to women; it cannot solve their problem in political involvement. It is because men may strive for equality of rights for the sake of women, and women may remain silent.<sup>52</sup> And there are some restrictions on government's assistance. First, women organizations must obey the party. Second, equality is not the primary goal of communism; if there are conflicts between the two,

women's rights will be sacrificed.<sup>53</sup>

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Generally speaking, political involvement of women has been greatly improved compared to the situation before the liberation, and the government has created certain social conditions for this involvement.<sup>54</sup> The recent decline can be traced to two reasons. Under the influence of traditional culture, people think it inappropriate to have women participating in politics. Women themselves hold a similar view, creating a weak political awareness and a lack of active participation.

### Section Three : Education

Ever since the early fifties, the government has been dedicated to eradicating illiteracy and promoting general education. Literacy rate of women has been raised tremendously, and this has made an obvious contribution to the raising of women's status.<sup>55</sup>

Even though women's education has been generally raised, as in other developing countries, it is not without its problems, which come mainly from three areas: the difference between cities and villages, the level of education, and students quitting school.

Generally cities are more favourable to women's education. The Situation inland is worse than in coastal areas, while remote areas are the worst. Remote areas such as Guizhou, Yunnan, Tibet, Gansu, Qinghai have rather low literacy rates for women, and the gender ratio index is higher than in other inland provinces. The situation is especially poor in Tibet, where the women's literacy rate stays at 19%, and the gender ratio index is 2.4, the highest in the nation.<sup>56</sup>

According to statistics, 88% of illiterate women are in villages and the countryside. This is because many villages, influenced by traditional concepts, consider it an extravagance to send daughters to school. They may need them to help out in the family, marry them to wealthy people, or send them to work in the cities. So many women do not have the opportunity of education.<sup>57</sup> Hence we can

see that, besides economic factors, traditional concepts also greatly affect women's education.

The higher the level of education, the greater is the difference in gender. Among the literate women in 1990, 58% have received only primary education, and 30% have studied for nine years. In primary schools, the ratio of boys to girls is 1.1; in secondary school it is 1.5; in colleges 1.6; in graduate schools the ratio rises to 2.3.<sup>58</sup> In some places female students are discriminated against. They need to get 10 or 20 marks higher than the boys in order to get into high colleges.<sup>59</sup>

1982 statistics shows that 69% of the illiterate or partially-illiterate nation-wide were women.<sup>60</sup> In a 1% by-census in 1987, the figure rose to 72%. This reveals that the opportunity for women in education, compared to that of men, is declining.<sup>61</sup> This is related to the phenomenon of female students quitting study.

With the transformation of economic structure, agriculture becomes a family contract. Men go to work in the cities, leaving women and children at home. And as the demand for manual labour is great, many children are forced to quit school to work in the fields. Because the tradition treasures males more than females, a majority of those who quit schools are girls.<sup>62</sup> Between 1980 and 1988, there were at least 40 million primary and secondary students who quit school and joined society, most of them were village girls.

In 1988, among the children who did not attend schools at a suitable age, 83% were girls, while 70% of the 3 million who dropped out from schools were girls. This aggravates the educational standard of village women.<sup>63</sup>

On the other hand, the raising of educational standards has only a limited effect on women's liberation, as some of the well-educated women are also deeply influenced by traditional culture. They think it is the duty of a virtuous wife to take care of the family, even sacrificing their own opportunity for the prospect of the husband.<sup>64</sup>



Generally speaking, the education of women has been greatly improved compared to the situation before the liberation. But their opportunity to receive higher education is still limited. As a result of the economic reform, there is a rising trend of women's illiteracy and more girls are quitting schools. Education is hindered by the factors of traditional culture and economy.



## Section Four : Law

Ever since the establishment of the new Chinese government in 1949, there has been great change in the legal status of women. The ordinance of sexual equality is explicitly written down in the *Common Principles*: "Women have the same rights as men with respect to politics, economy, civil education and social life." In the 1954 constitution and the 1950 new marriage ordinance, women are further protected against the concept of "men being superior to women."<sup>65</sup> There is no need for a married woman to assume her husband's family name; she can keep her own.<sup>66</sup> After marriage man and woman become family members of one another, and children can assume the family name of either the father or the mother. The spirit of sexual equality in marriage is realized in these ordinances, enabling women not to lose their independence in marriage.

It is stipulated in the marriage ordinance that the properties gained within the period of matrimony belong to the couple, and both sides have equal rights in handling them. It means that the incomes within the period of matrimony are common properties of the couple, not belonging solely to the one who earns. This reduces exploitation on the one who does house work, and offers financial protection. The inheritance ordinance also protects the rights of the husband and wife to inherit the properties of the spouse. If one passes away, the other has the right to inherit half of the properties,



leaving the other half to other relatives, allocated according to relationship.<sup>67</sup>

Chinese laws have provided very good protection for women. But there are various kinds of difficulties in execution, due to the influence of traditional culture and economic reform. We can see this in the ordinances of divorce and wife abuse, as well as in recent legislation on protection of women.

In the early stage of enacting the marriage law, women faced great oppression because the feudalistic thinking of society had not yet been changed. When women proposed divorce, some husbands would persecute or even kill their wives. Some women committed suicides as they could not tolerate the abuse of the husbands.<sup>68</sup> Such was the influence of traditional concepts.

Although there is legal protection on sexual equality and against the abuse of women, many women do not know this. Even if they know it, they seldom take legal action for fear of losing face and because of financial dependence. Thus they can only tolerate the disgust and hide their grievances, and hope their husband will treat them better next time.<sup>69</sup>

In society, many people are still holding the rotten concept that "the best judge cannot clarify family affairs," and are tolerant to husbands abusing and persecuting wives. Gradually wife abuse is regarded as a family affair instead of a legal offence. Even the law-

enforcing departments may do nothing more than giving advice or ignoring it, thus encouraging the offenders.<sup>70</sup>

The Women's Federation is also helpless in stemming family violence completely, as it is not a law-enforcement department. It can only handle complaints, mediate reconciliation, or prosecute, depending on the nature of the cases.<sup>71</sup>

Recent legislation states that the women's issue is biological, not social. This is different from the policies during the Cultural Revolution which emphasized sexual similarity,<sup>72</sup> based on which anti-discriminatory laws were legislated to ensure equality of treatment in working places. But recent legislation emphasizes sexual differences, and that the government has to protect women.<sup>73</sup> This protection increases the cost of employers, but at the same time offers them a spacious leeway in the freedom of explanation. Thus, for the sake of their own benefits, employers may refuse employment of women, force them to retire, or do not provide them with the fringe benefits they deserve.<sup>74</sup>

The situation is even worse in the "Special Economic Zones." Everything is economy-oriented, and women's benefits are subordinated to the target of national economic development.<sup>75</sup> Here women's labour is needed, therefore there is no advocacy of women returning home; but on the other hand, protection laws are also non-existent. Even when there are requirements in certain

economic zones to give women special health protection according to government ordinance, it is not earnestly implemented.<sup>76</sup>



Generally speaking, the Chinese government has very good legal protection for women. But due to the influence of traditional concepts, family violence is recurrent. And as a result of economic development, female workers in the economic zones are exploited in various ways. The legal protections have not been firmly implemented.

## Section Five : Family and Marriage

With the implementation of the marriage ordinance, blind and bargain marriages have been greatly reduced. Women can retain their own family name after marriage, and children can assume the family name of either the father or the mother. Male and female have equal rights to inheritance. All these indicate that women are enjoying a higher status compared to that before the liberation.<sup>77</sup>

As women step into society and become economically independent from the husbands, their family status is also raised, and most of them feel satisfied about their marriage life. (Couple relationships: deep 61.7%, fair 34.6%, cool 2.7%, tense 0.9%)<sup>78</sup>

Another survey shows that women have freedom of choice in marriage, rights in mutual decision on child birth, rights in mutual management and control over family incomes, rights in mutual decision of family expenditure, the right of choice in self-development and a say on children's development.<sup>79</sup> However most of the housework still falls on women. Generally speaking, husbands in the cities are more willing to share the burden of housework.<sup>80</sup>

When women are able to express themselves fully in economic activities, their self-esteem is also greatly enhanced. Thus they demand respect and love in matrimony, and are no longer willing to

be victims of feudalistic tribalism nor reproductive tools to maintain the lineage, not to say sexual tools for men's exotic desires. As they are seeking for happiness and harmony in matrimony,<sup>81</sup> divorce increases in number. Most of the divorce cases are proposed by women, as they do not want to tolerate husbands' abuse, and take more initiative than before.<sup>82</sup>

The government's "one-child policy" frees women from the burden of child birth and rearing, and enables them to join society and become economically independent.<sup>83</sup> But this policy has also usurped women's decision rights on child birth, and the mandatory abortion of the second child will easily hurt the women physically and psychologically.<sup>84</sup> However, in view of the burden of the Chinese population, this provisional measure seems inevitable.<sup>85</sup>

However, the problems of women are not completely solved. The deep influence of traditional concepts shows itself in areas of choice of spouse, family violence,<sup>86</sup> drowning of baby girls and abortion.

Tradition demands women not to out-perform men,<sup>87</sup> men are dominant, women are dependent. In a psychological survey, 70% of the young ladies expressed that their standard for choosing spouses are "manly, career-minded and decisive." 63% of the young men have as their standard "virtuous, kind and pretty." "Male should be decisive, female should be virtuous," is this not a modern version of "men outside, women inside?" The demand for



the male to be "manly" and the female to be "kind," is this not the same as the gender stereotype of male being dominant and female being dependent? It seems that the concept of "men outside, women inside" is still deeply rooted in the consciousness and sub-consciousness of some Chinese people.<sup>88</sup>

Influenced by the traditional culture of valuing males more than females, there now appears in China the phenomenon of gender imbalance, drowning of baby girls, abortion and illegal over-birth.<sup>89</sup> According to a report on July 3, 1990 in *Wen Hui Bao*, Hong Kong, the ratio of baby girls to baby boys in Guangxi Province in 1989 was 100 to 121. There is a great gender imbalance, and it can be foreseen that in the future there will be many men without wives. Sources reveal that the strong gender imbalance in Guangxi is partly due to the very serious problem of drowning of baby girls. This is more than just an isolated incident; the entire nation is facing a similar problem.<sup>90</sup>

Illegal over-birth is especially common in villages. Pregnant women forfeit their residential records and go to places far away to give birth to illegal babies, just for the sake of evading birth restriction<sup>91</sup> and begetting sons. Some women scan their foetuses with advanced supersonic waves. If it is a girl, it will be aborted.<sup>92</sup> But it is good to see that recently parents in Shanghai are no longer valuing males more than females, and they hope to have girls more than boys.<sup>93</sup>



Generally speaking, the status of women in marriage and in the family have been greatly raised compared to that before the liberation. Nevertheless traditional culture is still deeply influential, leading to social problems like the choosing of spouses, abusing of wives, drowning of babies and abortion.

## Concluding Comments

In conclusion, we can say that in the past forty years Chinese Socialism has been affirming the value and contribution of women, advocating the concept that "women can hold up half of the sky," thus enabling women to work in society, raising their economic status, and, as a result, enhancing their self-esteem. Many women have thus recovered their self-respect, confidence and independence.

However, the problems of women are not completely solved. We still see that many women, though economically independent and well-educated, are influenced by traditional concepts to the result of having a low self-esteem. This is because traditional culture is still running its course in society, moulding individuals through the process of socialization to low self-image. The Chinese government tries to replace traditional culture with socialism, not knowing that culture has the need and characteristic of transmission. Thus it is necessary to re-affirm Chinese culture, emphasizing sexual equality and their mutual complementary function. Moreover, in this transitional period when the Chinese economy is booming and society is rapidly changing, it is understandable that the Chinese government finds it hard to fully implement its policies.

On the other hand, scholars have pointed out that the present change in the status of women in China is following a "popular mode," meaning that it has the target of satisfying basic needs, with

an emphasis on quantity. The level is relatively low, striving at simultaneous improvements in all aspects. The characteristic of this mode is to raise women's status as a whole through general education and wide employment. Development in every aspect is quite even, and there is not much difference among women. Its problem is that the quality is still waiting for improvement, and women are still out of touch with high level politics and social leadership. This is concretely shown in the fact that though the proportion of illiterate women has been drastically reduced, the opportunity of women to receive higher education is still less than that of men. Among employed women, those in specialized technology, politics and leadership roles are still relatively few. The enhancement of women's social and political status falls behind that of economic status. Future development ought to be building on the present foundation and enhancing its quality, having more women receiving higher education and professional training and participating in leading roles.<sup>94</sup>

## Chapter Notes

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<sup>1</sup>In dealing with the women's situation in contemporary China, we will pay more attention to the difficulties and challenges they are facing. This may give a wrong impression to readers that they are suffering from loads of difficulties. Actually the same phenomenon will be obtained if we use the same method to study the women's issue in any other countries. Furthermore, the vast domain of China and its drastic change in economy and society make these difficulties understandable. Nevertheless, we see that women's status has been significantly enhanced despite the unfavourable conditions, as a result of the endeavour of the government as well as its people, with the proper administration of government policies.

<sup>2</sup>Hong Xiuquan advocated several ways to promote women's status: 1) to establish a women's army with women as its leaders, so that women could go out of the family and serve society; 2) to forbid rape, prostitution and to implement monogamy; 3) to simplify the wedding ceremony, forbidding trading on marriage; 4) to promote economic equality through equality in property rights. See Xue Linglan, *Chain or Bible?* (Beijing: Chinese People University, 1992), pp.55-56.

<sup>3</sup>These newspapers for women include Chen Jiefen's *Women's News*, Qiu Jin's *Chinese Women's News*, etc. These newspapers



aroused educated people's concern about sexual equality. Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>There were some famous women organizations among the Boxers, such as the "Red Lights," "Blue Lights," "Black Lights," "Green Lights," etc. They fought bravely for the people revealing their concern and dedication to the country. During Sun's revolution, Tang Yingnian mobilized women and men to save the country, and a lot of women joined the movement. Ibid., pp.61-63.

<sup>5</sup>Yih Hanming, "Chinese Women Politics," *Shi* vol. 6 (1992), pp.20-22.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp.21-23. The revolution at the beginning of this century triggered the rise of women's status, and the spouses of communist revolutionaries in the thirties were very active in the revolution. Many of them were well known in the People's Republic, among them were Mao's wife Jiang Qing, who attracted much attention especially in the Cultural Revolution, Liu Shaoqi's wife Wang Guangmei, Zhou Enlai's wife Deng Yongchao, and Lin Biao's wife Yie Qun. These were all influential in the political arena. See Duan Jixian & Zhao Xiaohua, "A study in the status of contemporary Chinese women," *Hong Kong Social Science News*, pilot volume (1993), p.38.

<sup>8</sup>The Nationalists and the Communists split in 1927, and the latter fortified in Jinggang Hill as their base. Many members of the women's movement joined them. At that time a constitution was issued in the Su area, Jiangxi, together with the land ordinance, marriage ordinance, etc., stipulating women's rights in voting and election, freedom in marriage, owning properties, etc., and promoting education of women. Yie Hanming, *ibid.*, p.23.

<sup>9</sup>After the liberation in 1949, women's liberation proceeded in four directions: 1) mobilizing women to participate in social production and construction; 2) educating women, arousing their awareness, motivating them to work, and instigating them to utilize their talents; 3) caring about women's life, implementing the policies of sexual equality with respect to salary and family matters, stirring them to care about their own rights; 4) establishing nation-wide women organizations, with full-time staff to liaise between the party and the people. See Chong Fengci, "Chinese Women and Society," Liang Shouhua ed., *Christian Faith and the Prospect of China* (Hong Kong: Graduate School of Theology, 1994), p.123. We personally believe that the government has also made improvements in the areas of politics and law.

<sup>10</sup>After 1949 China set up three people's organizations. The Women's Federation was one of them, holding their national general meetings once in every four years. It was suspended for 21 years after

1957. After the fourth assembly in 1978, the annual meeting is convened once in every five years. Structurally, the Federation is headed by the Beijing Chinese National Women's Union, under which are women's unions in scores of provinces and municipal cities including 55 minority tribes, organized in levels of province, city, county, town and village. Ibid., p.127

<sup>11</sup>The Chinese Women's Federation, as an organization promoting women's liberation and fighting for women's rights, has a very wide scope of services. Beginning from the birth of a baby, the Federation has provided ever improving baby-sitting services. For the sake of school children, the Federation has organized parents' schools, instructing them on the way to counsel children in behaviour, thinking and study. When children grow up, the Federation gives them instruction on dating and marriage counselling. There are also schools for mothers and in-laws, teaching them how to take care of babies as well as in-law relationships. The Federation believes the primary path to women's liberation is through economic independence and involvement in social production. As child care is a hindrance to women's participation in society, the Federation tries their best in providing baby-sitting service. As women cannot compete with men when their educational standard is low, the Federation takes it as their urgent task to provide education and technological training. After hundreds of years of feudalistic inequality, women's liberation cannot be

achieved in one day. Thus the Federation actively fights for women's rights. See *Report on China-Hong Kong Women Interflow* (Hong Kong: Council of New Women, 1987), pp.1-2.

<sup>12</sup>Li Shun, "On the legal status of Chinese women and legal consciousness of the people," Li Xiaojiang ed., *Puzzles about Chinese Women*, p.155.

<sup>13</sup>According to Karl Marx, there was sexual equality in primitive society. But the development of social production produced division of labour, which led to private ownership, class struggle and sexual exploitation. See Li Jingzhi, Zhang Xinxu & Ding Juan, *Marxist Teachings on Women* (Beijing: Chinese People University, 1992), pp.1-17.

<sup>14</sup>Chong Fengci, *ibid.*, p.123.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p.122.

<sup>16</sup>The age-group analysis reveals the change over time. Let us begin with the age groups 60-64 and over 65. At 1949, these women were over 20 years old and could be employed when the People's Republic was established. Their employment rate is 27% and 8% respectively. Nearly 10% and 5% respectively of those unemployed are in retirement, and they are mainly in the cities, as villages do not yet have this benefit. 50% of the unemployed have never worked in society;



their main work is household work. Family women also comprise a large proportion for age group 55-59, but the percentage drops dramatically with age. Those under 40 years old are the new generations after the establishment of the People's Republic. Age groups 20-39 have apparently higher employment rates, namely 91%, with family women falling below 10%. This signifies the great change in their status. See Duan Jixian & Zhao Xiaohua, *ibid.*, pp.44-46.

<sup>17</sup>"The Sky of the female is low," p.7.

<sup>18</sup>Duan Jixian & Zhao Xiaohua, *ibid.*, p.48.

<sup>19</sup>Li Shuqing, "An Evaluation of the Level and Quality of Women's Employment," Sha Jicai ed., *Status of Contemporary Chinese Women* (Beijing: University Press, 1995), pp.316-329.

<sup>20</sup>The third census of Hubei Province in 1982 shows that women employed in the first type of occupation (agriculture and fishery) occupied 81.82%, 7.1% higher than that of men. A 1% by-census in 1982 again shows similar findings. Employed women in the second type of occupation (industry) in 1982 occupied 10.9%, and in the third type (commerce and service) 7.28%. In 1987 the distribution of employed women in the second type rose to 11.77%, while that in the third type fell to 6.41%. In 1990 women in the first type rose back to 82.38%, while the second type fell to 9.61%, and the third type was



8.01%. There has not been any basic change. Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Sha Jicai ed., *ibid.*, p.317.

<sup>22</sup>*Report on China-Hong Kong Women Interflow*, p.317.

<sup>23</sup>Wu Qing, *ibid.*, p.36.

<sup>24</sup>Li Yongfeng, *Cultural Mentality under Change* (Beijing: International culture, 1988), pp.90-91.

<sup>25</sup>Li Xiaojiang, "Preface," Li Xiaojiang ed., *Gender and China* (Beijing: Joint Publishing, 1994), p.12.

<sup>26</sup>Zhu Chuzhu & Jiang Zhenghua, *Chinese Women Population* (Henan: People's Publishing, 1991), pp.93-109.

<sup>27</sup>In the past all jobs were allocated by the government, and there were no private companies, thus there were no need of dismissal of workers.

<sup>28</sup>"Women don't yet hold up half the sky," South China Morning Post, Nov.7, 1994. See also Li Xiaojiang, "Chinese Women under the Great Tide of Reform," Li Xiaojiang ed., *Puzzles about Chinese Women*, p.379; Li Xiaojiang, "Preface," Li Xiaojiang ed., *Gender and China*, p.12.

<sup>29</sup>"The Sky of the female is low," p.8.

<sup>30</sup>Xue Linglan, *ibid.*, pp.138-140. A fresh graduate Zhu Hong reported to a news agency, only to be told that there was no vacancy. After she left, the agency employed several male graduates. See *ibid.*, p.159.

<sup>31</sup>Tan Liying, "Women in China," *In God's Image*, vol. 13 no.4 (1994), p.3. See also Li Xiaojiang, "Chinese Women under the Great Tide of Reform," p.378.

<sup>32</sup>Wu Qing, "More Choices, More Burdens," *In God's Image*, vol.13 no.4 (1994), p.9. This phenomenon can be seen in the case of Daqiu Village, which becomes prosperous for its development of heavy industry. Due to economic re-structuring, women are advised to return home. Apparently this is a trend of reform. It fits the need of men in keen competition, alleviates women's tension in dual roles, and reduces the non-productive burdens of the company. This is beneficial to social stability, industrial development, work of men and enjoyment of women. But this mode of women returning home is in fact a return to the traditional mode, drowning the personal values of women for the fulfillment of men's maximum social value. See Li Xiaojiang, "Chinese Women under the Great Tide of Reform," pp.381-382.

<sup>33</sup>According to a national family survey conducted in 27

municipal cities in 1991, 22% expressed that their work was affected by the caring of children, and some had even resigned. See "The Sky of the Female is Low," p.8.

<sup>34</sup>Li Xiaojiang, "Chinese Women under the Great Tide of Reform," p.378.

<sup>35</sup>"The Sky of the Female is Low," p.8.

<sup>36</sup>Margarette Wu, "Protection and Equality of Chinese Female Workers," Li Xiaojiang ed., *Gender and China*, p.100.

<sup>37</sup>South China Morning Post, Sept. 8, 1991.

<sup>38</sup>"The Sky of the Female is Low," p.8.

<sup>39</sup>One incident will show how great is the pressure upon village women. Auntie Zhang has a family of five. Her husband is a factory manager, her daughter works in a plastic moulding factory. Auntie Zhang has to take care of the three *mou* of farmlands all by herself. In the morning she sells vegetables in the market, and in the afternoon she works in the farm. Each month she has to pay a revenue of 90 yuan, and she gets the remainder from the selling of vegetables. Besides shouldering the farm work for the whole family, she has to do house work at night. See *Report on China-Hong Kong Women Interflow*, p.8.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p.5.

<sup>41</sup>Wu Qing, "The Impact of Reforms on Women in China," pp.26-27. See also Zhu Chuzhu & Jiang Zhenghua, *ibid.*, p.92; Wu Qing, "More Choices, More Burdens," p.6.

<sup>42</sup>"Chinese Women: what makes them stay in the farms?" Li Xiaojiang ed., *Gender and China*, p.147. See also Li Xiaojiang, "Preface," *ibid.*, pp.12-13.

<sup>43</sup>Statistics confirm what has been said. A national survey by Women Research Centre under the guidance of Women Federation and China Statistics Bureau reveals that 30% of women consider men to be naturally stronger than women. See Margarete Wu, *ibid.*, p.104.

<sup>44</sup>Economically speaking, enhancement of women's social status and an improvement on sexual discrimination in employment require a theoretical recognition of the social value of pregnancy, and practical recompense to women for their social contribution. Two possible ways have been raised. One is to set up a birth fund for female workers, reimbursing by society all the expenditure for giving birth, including maternity leave, medical care, and cost for delay of work caused by nursing babies. Another is that the expenditure be covered by the units of both the husband and the wife. See Xue Linglan, *ibid.*, pp.162-164.

<sup>45</sup>Yie Hanming, *ibid.*, pp.20-23.

<sup>46</sup>Duan Jixian & Zhao Xiaohua, *ibid.*, p.38.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup>“Fixed quota” election means that the number of nominees is equal to the number of vacancies, and voters can only have the choice between accepting or rejecting. In “Differential quota” election, the number of nominees is greater than the number of vacancies, and voters can choose whom to vote for among the nominees.

<sup>49</sup>“Woman don’t yet hold up half the sky,” *South China Morning Post*, Nov. 7, 1994.

<sup>50</sup>Xue Linglan, *ibid.*, pp.154-156. And Theresa C. Carino, *ibid.*, pp.12-13.



<sup>51</sup>This provisional policy does not conflict with the principle of fair competition. Its purpose is to counter-balance the unfavourable conditions for women's participation in politics, so that the competition can be more favourable and balanced. Having guaranteed this proportion, the government should also have other means to raise women's quality, such as establishing a basis for the cultivation and election of women leaders, having a purposeful and well-planned scheme of cultivation and election, and advocating the contribution of female cadres through the media, so as to boost their fame and facilitate their election. See Xue Linglan, *ibid.*, pp.157-158.

<sup>52</sup>Li Xiaojiang, "Chinese Women under the Great Tide of Reform," p.385.

<sup>53</sup>Yie Hanming, *ibid.*, p.23. See also *Report on China-Hong Kong Women Interflow*, pp.1-2, 5.

<sup>54</sup>Yie Hanming points out the conditions for women's political involvement: 1) economic conditions -- women can be economically independent; 2) educational condition -- the higher the standard of education, the greater the awareness and the more active participation in society; 3) political condition -- it is easier for women to get involved in an open political system. *Ibid.*, p.20. The government also speeds up women's participation through fixed proportion allocation.

<sup>55</sup>According to incomplete statistics of 1913-1916, only 1 out of 23 students was female. 1982 census shows that the literacy rate of women above 50 was only 8%, far below the 48% of men. The rate for women above 15 was 51%. 1990 statistics shows that literacy rate of women above 15 was 68%, and that within the age group 10-19 was as high as 93%. Only 7% of young women were not educated, which is a great progress. The Gender ratio index of literacy above age 15 was 1.5 in 1982, that means for every 1.5 literate men, there is 1 literate woman. The index fell to 1.3 in 1990. For the age group 10-19, the index was 1.04. From the fifties to the eighties, males students who have finished primary education rose from 70% to 98%, while that of female rose from 30% to 94%. See Duan Jixian & Zhao Xiaohua, *ibid.*, p.39.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.39-41.

<sup>57</sup>Theresa C. Carino, "Women in Rural China," *In God's Image* vol.13 no.4 (1994), p.15.

<sup>58</sup>Duan Jixian & Zhao Xiaohua, *ibid.*, p.41.

<sup>59</sup>Tan Li-ying, "Women in China," *In God's Image* vol.13 no.4 (1994), p.3.

<sup>60</sup>Association for the Advancement of Feminism, "The Current Situation of Women in China," *Women's News Digest* no.30 (July 1993),

p.13.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid. See also Tien Yingjie, "New Generation of Chinese," trans. Lao Baoxia, *Tripod* vol.81 (1994), p.6.

<sup>63</sup>Gao Xiaoxian, "Modern China and the Change in Status of Village Women," Li Xiaojang ed., *Gender and China* (Beijing: Joint Publishing, 1994), p.124. See also Association for the Advancement of Feminism, "The Current Situation of Women in China," *Women's News Digest* no.30 (July, 1993), p.13.

<sup>64</sup>Wu Qing, "The Impact of Reforms on Women In China," p.36.

<sup>65</sup>Li Shun, *ibid.*, p.155.

<sup>66</sup>Gao Ying, "Women's Role in the Chinese Church," *ANS Documentation* (Jan., 1995).

<sup>67</sup>*Report on China-Hong Kong Women Interflow*, pp.22-23.

<sup>68</sup>China clearly legislated in the fifties that both husbands and wives have the rights to propose divorce, with the intention to solve the problems of those who were forced to be married by parents or who could not live peacefully together. In 1952, there were 1 million cases of divorce, mostly proposed by women. But very often women were

either killed by their husbands or committed suicide when they were seeking divorce. In 1950, there were 80,000 cases of divorce, and at the same time 70,000 cases of family homicide or women's suicide. In the first half of 1951, over 10,000 women committed suicide due to family oppression. So the ordinance was amended in late 50's so that divorce had to be with the husbands' consent. In 1981, it was again amended that either side could propose divorce if the relationship had broken down beyond reconciliation. This is because there have been changes in the concept of divorce; it is no longer regarded as a shame. See ed., "Status of Women in Contemporary China," *Tripod* vol.77 (1993), pp.24-25; Theresa C. Carino, "Women in Rural China," p.12-15.

<sup>69</sup>"Women don't yet hold up half the sky," *South China Morning Post*, Nov. 7, 1994.

<sup>70</sup>Xue Linglan, *ibid.*, p.198.

<sup>71</sup>*Report on China-Hong Kong Women Interflow*, p.26.

<sup>72</sup>Margarette Wu, *ibid.*, p.93.

<sup>73</sup>*Women's Rights Protection Ordinance* lists the kinds of jobs unsuitable for women, affirms sexual differences, and requires all units to protect the safety and health of women at work according to the laws, so that women can enjoy special treatment during menstruation, pregnancy, maternity, nursing and menopause. It is also legislated that

women retire at age 50, while men at age 60. These are meant to protect the well-being of women. Ibid., pp.94-96.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>In the process of economic development, sexual equality has been forced to take a back seat by the target of socialist economic development. Women's family function and biological characteristics are again stressed. Ibid., pp.97-98.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., pp.99-100.

<sup>77</sup>Xue Linglan, *ibid.*, pp.176-183. Blind marriages and male inheritance are still quite common in villages. See "Women's Issues in Rural China--the work of Ms. Xie Li-hua," *The Asia Lutheran* (Dec., 1995), p.16.

<sup>78</sup>Wang Ruiqi & Wen Rongguang, *A Survey on Sexual Life on Both Sides of the Strait* (Taipei: Times Culture, 1994), p.50. As this survey does not provide any data on the number of years of marriage, we have reservations about its results. We believe a couple's relationship is related to the number of years of marriage.

<sup>79</sup>Sha Jicai ed., *ibid.*, pp.354-357.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., pp.55-57.



<sup>81</sup>Chen Ying, *Symposium on Pragmatic Ethics in China and Japan* (Beijing: Social Science Literature, 1993), pp.85-86.

<sup>82</sup>There were 340,000 divorces in 1980, and 650,000 in 1988. See "The Current Situation of Women in China," p.12.

<sup>83</sup>The "one-child policy" propagates the concept of sexual equality, and it frees women from their burden, because in the past a woman might have to spend 20 to 30 years to take care of her children, but now when she has only one child, all that she needs is a maternity leave. The government and Women Federation have also provided numerous assistance, such as a wholistic child-care service.

<sup>84</sup>Lao Baoxia, "Viewing the Lament of Birth-Control Executors from the Perspective of *Kalpa*," *Tripod* vol.84 (1994). *Tripod* is a Roman Catholic journal, and readers ought to be more critical toward their objectivity.

<sup>85</sup>In a country with the tradition of "men being superior," it seems inevitable for the authorities to make decisions with the male as the political centre, even in this weighty matter of birth rights concerning millions of women. People had been ignorant about the increasing burden of the growing population, and the sudden awakening presses the authorities to solve the problem in the shortest time possible. The difficulties they face can be imagined. If women had been

consulted with respect to birth control early in the fifties, the "one-child policy" would not have been the inevitable measure to control the population. And as the policy is eagerly implemented, hurt is inflicted upon women in the same process that is intended to help them. See Duan Jixian & Zhao Xiaohua, *ibid.*, p.54.

<sup>86</sup>On a snowy New Year's Eve in 1982, Zhang Minglan was beaten by her husband until her backbone cracked, and was then thrown outdoor. She hid for eight years, finally telling her misfortune in tears to the municipal court. See Xue Linglan, *ibid.*, pp.150-151.

<sup>87</sup>According to a survey done at the Beijing University, 80% of the male students desire to have beautiful, gentle and obedient girl friends rather than having one with the same ideal and the same or stronger ability. See "The Current Situation of Women in China," pp.11-12. Besides, many female graduate students do not have love affairs because boys do not want to have better-educated wives. See Li Yongfeng, *ibid.*, pp.90-93.

<sup>88</sup>Li Yongfeng, *ibid.*, pp.81-82.

<sup>89</sup>The "One child policy" is not easily be implemented in the villages, where the Chinese tradition of valuing males more than females is still very strong. If a woman has given birth to a girl, she will risk everything to have a boy. Unfortunately, drowning and abandoning of

babies are also common, just to have another chance to get a boy. See Lao Baoxia, *ibid.*, p.17.

<sup>90</sup>Lin Ruiqi & Tang Han, "Impacts on Chinese Families," *Tripod* vol. 72 (1993), p.6. Also, according to *Peasants Daily* in 1992, the male birth rate compared to the female birth rate is 114:100. It is estimated that 70 million men cannot find spouses at a suitable age. See Lao Baoxia, *ibid.*, pp.18-20.

<sup>91</sup>The government is enforcing the "one child policy," but in remote areas where manpower is the major productive power, local officials exercise flexibility in implementing this policy, allowing each family to have one more child.

<sup>92</sup>South China Morning Post, June 22, 1993.

<sup>93</sup>According to a research done by the Population Research Centre of Eastern China Teachers Training University, under the present birth policy, 52.8% of married women do not have any sex preference for their babies. Among those who do have a preference, there are more who want to have baby girls than boys. A majority (94.8%) are not influenced by others, and consider child-bearing their private business. What they consider most is their own practical situation. This reveals that Shanghai's married women have stronger self-consciousness with respect to the issue of child-birth. See Ni Bo, "Shanghai People--

satisfied to have a girl," *Ming Pao* Oct. 27, 1995.

<sup>94</sup>Duan Jixian & Zhao Xiaohua, *ibid.*, p.56.





## **Chapter Three**

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### **Women in the Contemporary Chinese Church**

## Introductory Comments

Chinese female Christians are growing on Chinese soil, deeply influenced by its traditional culture and social situation, as well as by the church tradition and its conservative interpretation of faith. The traditional culture and the social situation have already been discussed. Based on that background, we will analyze the situation of the church.

China is a vast country and situations differ a lot in various districts. The information we have collected is limited, especially with respect to nation-wide statistical data.<sup>1</sup> Therefore we will not approach the issue statistically, but rely on quality interviews, articles and personal testimonies.<sup>2</sup> We have also specifically made five individual interviews, as well as two group interviews at the Eastern China Theological Seminary and the Nanjing Union Seminary. Interviewees are mostly females from Shandong, Xiamen, Shanghai, Jiangxi, Guangzhou and Yunnan.

We have also collected many real cases of faithful women. In order not to disturb the unity of the text, these touching incidents are put into the footnotes, and readers can read them carefully as reference. In this chapter we still aim at a general description. General phenomenon on women's situation in the church is drawn inductively from the information we have, using information from the interviews to supplement and confirm that from the articles, so as

to increase its credibility. The examples cited in the first section, women's contribution, and the second section, female Christian exemplars, are general incidents collected from journals on the Chinese church over the past fifteen years.<sup>3</sup> We hope in this way a picture of the general situation of women in church and society can be obtained.

The first section introduces the general situation of women in the Chinese church, their status, difficulties and contribution. The second section touches on the church's concern for women inside and outside the church, and how it raises women's status in the church.

## **Section One : Current Situation of Women in the Church**

The Chinese church has been rapidly growing in the past forty years, and the status of women has been significantly raised. However they are still facing many limitations and difficulties imposed by traditional culture, the social situation, and church tradition. But women continue to contribute their talents and ability for the growth of the church.

### **A. General Situation**

The church has increased ten-fold since the liberation,<sup>4</sup> with female believers occupying around 70%. There is a shortage of pastors, and the workload of shepherding is very heavy. Therefore the Chinese church is training pastors and laity through theological education, volunteer training programmes and correspondence courses. The church has paid special attention to females, thus there is a significant increase in the number of females receiving training and being ordained.

### **1. Church Growth**

According to official data, there are over 8 million Christians in China, of which around 70% are female.<sup>5</sup> The five provinces

most abundant in believers are Zhejiang, Fujian, Henan, Anhui and Sichuan.<sup>6</sup> At the end of 1988, there were about 6,500 churches, of which 2,700 were built within the 80's. Registered meeting points are over 20,000, some of which are huge church buildings capable of accommodating 1,000 to 2,000 people.<sup>7</sup>

There are some unique factors that enable the Chinese church to grow from less than 1 million believers in 1949<sup>8</sup> to nearly 10 million at present. Analyzing from the social science perspective, scholars abroad have pointed out four main reasons for church growth:<sup>9</sup>

1) Traditional and historical factors: the church has a long history in some districts, like Zhejiang, Wenzhou and Fujian. Christianity has a good reputation in these places and it is easy to obtain people's trust and to attract them to the Lord.

2) Social factors: in villages where the educational standard is low, people are rather superstitious. Some simply replace the traditional idols with Jesus Christ.

3) Miracles:<sup>10</sup> Many are converted through the healing of illnesses and consolation in difficulties. They feel that Christian faith is real and effective.

4) Phenomenon of the rebound: after the long suppression of the Cultural Revolution, people begin to enjoy religious freedom.



The Helongjiang church is the fastest growing church in Manchuria. A local pastor Rev. Lu Zhibin offers four reasons for church growth:<sup>11</sup>

1) Implementation of government religious policy: people can assemble freely, increasing the opportunity of believing in the Lord.

2) The elderly searching for a destiny: facing death, the elderly want to know where they are heading to. Christianity offers an answer.

3) The young out of curiosity:<sup>12</sup> young people cannot find the meaning of life from society and school, but they notice the joyful life of Christians and are attracted to search for faith.

4) Evangelistic broadcasts from overseas:<sup>13</sup> many are converted through radio evangelistic broadcasts from overseas.

From our interviews, we can add two more reasons:<sup>14</sup>

1) Witness of Christians:<sup>15</sup> people are interested to know the source of Christian love and virtue, and meet Christ in the process of their search.

2) Family factors: Many are converted by the good Christian family education and witnesses of family members.<sup>16</sup> The influence of the mother is especially great in these two areas.

Among the above ten factors of church growth, the first eight are factors external to the church, only the final two are internal factors. So we will talk more about the well-pleasing testimonies of female Christians.

There are more females than males in the church. From the interviews we made, we observe four reasons for this:<sup>17</sup>

1) Traditional cultural factors: Traditional culture requires men to worship ancestors and to sustain the lineage. This gives great pressure upon those who believe in the Lord. Furthermore, males are shaped by traditional culture to be independent, even from spirits.

2) Social factors: Village women spend more time at home and on the farms, and have a more flexible arrangement of time than men who work outside. Hence they have more opportunities to come into contact with the faith.

3) Feminine character: Women are more earnest in the pursuit of goodness and perfection, and society allows them to be more sentimental. As they have less opportunity in education than the men, they are not so used to delve into the philosophical aspects of faith, but are more susceptible to the Christian faith of love.

4) Biological and psychological factors: Women are physically weaker, but have to shoulder the very strenuous work at home and on

the farms. As they often do not have enough to eat, they easily fall ill. Hence they hope to obtain healing and joy from the faith.

## 2. Pastoring and Training

According to a survey of the two Christian councils, at the end of 1988 there were around 12,000 workers, among whom were 6 bishops, 900 pastors (75 female), 2,000 presbyters, 5,697 deacons and 3,437 preachers. The number of lay leaders is 40,108.<sup>18</sup> But the 1994 statistics shows that the number of female pastors has increased to 223, about 1/6 of the total number of pastors. This has been an impressive growth.<sup>19</sup>

There are not enough pastors in the church, and there is also an age gap.<sup>20</sup> Pastors are usually responsible for many meeting points, making their work strenuous and demanding.<sup>21</sup> As there are not enough pastors, the pastoral work very often relies on the presbyters, seminarians and volunteers,<sup>22</sup> who are mainly female.

There are usually more churches in the cities, with full-time pastors and staff. But villages usually rely on informal meeting places, and are more deficient in clergy and resources.<sup>23</sup> The educational standard of believers, especially females, is rather low.<sup>24</sup> However, some churches and meeting points have attracted a lot of young people, educated people and professionals in recent years.<sup>25</sup>

Faced with the rapid growth of the church as well as the low education standard of believers, the Chinese church trains pastors and laity through theological education, training programs and correspondence courses. There are thirteen seminaries in the nation,<sup>26</sup> responsible for the training of clergy. There are 465 female students, 56.5% of the total. There are 46 female lecturers, 47.4% of the total.<sup>27</sup> The number of female leaders is increasing, and there is already a female vice-president at the Nanjing Union Seminary.<sup>28</sup>

Training programs of different scales have been run in various places for lay leaders and volunteers, and there have been many female trainers and trainees.<sup>29</sup> More than 10 million Bibles have been printed.<sup>30</sup> The Chinese Christian Council has published a series of very successful teaching materials for correspondence courses.<sup>31</sup>

### **B. Status of Women**

Being influenced by social liberation, women status in the church has been greatly raised compared to the situation before the liberation.<sup>32</sup>

Before the liberation, women's level of service was low and there were not many posts open to them. Their ministry was mainly limited to preachers, deaconesses and clerks.



But after the liberation, most volunteers are women. They shoulder a major portion of the church work and evangelism, and are responsible for various kinds of jobs like preaching, visits, teaching and cleaning.

Before the liberation, female preachers were discouraged from marriage, because they were totally dedicated to the Lord. Their salary was lower than their male counterparts, they could not be ordained, and could not administer sacraments. There were very few female pastors before 1949. Rev. Li Tienai was the first Chinese female pastor of the Anglican Church, ordained before the Japanese invasion. But after the war, the Anglican Church did not recognize these female pastors ordained out of necessity.<sup>33</sup>

After the liberation, the status of women in the cities, especially those at work, has been greatly raised. Influenced by social liberation, the church began to ordain women.<sup>34</sup> Both male and female pastors are ordained by the church with the conditions of being graduated from a seminary and having at least three years of working experience. Out of special needs, even those who have not completed the theological training, or even those who have not been trained, can be ordained. Nevertheless, there are differences in practice at various places. Ordination of women can be more difficult in some districts, due to the influence of denominational traditions<sup>35</sup> (such as the Little Flock) and traditional culture.<sup>36</sup>



In order to have a better chance to serve and to be accepted by believers, female preachers are usually willing to be ordained. After the fifth National Conference in 1993, places like Shandong and Zhejiang, where there had been no female pastors, also began to ordain women. Key leaders in the church are still men, and women are usually assistants, but the relationship among colleagues is harmonious, working cooperatively for the church. Division of labour is according to talents and gifts. Believers respect the pastors for their virtue and spirituality, and not for their gender; male and female pastors are equally respected.<sup>37</sup>

Female pastors and female leaders are widely accepted in some areas. Three quarters of the members of the Shanghai Grace Church are female, and they occupy more than half of the leading posts. They are the pillars of the Church, taking charge of the Church's ministry and administrative affairs.<sup>38</sup> Women's status in Guangzhou churches has been greatly raised. There has been established a women's group at the leadership level, leading women's ministry in various churches. Five female pastors have been ordained up to 1992, a quarter of the total number of pastors.<sup>39</sup>

The situation of women inside the church is very similar to that outside. Their status has been greatly raised, but there are still many hindrances.

The fifth National Conference in 1993 had originally

stipulated that among the representatives of leaders, 30% should be female. Some provinces respected this request and sent the appropriate proportion of representatives. But some provinces ignored this and sent only one woman out of more than ten representatives. The result was that only 21.4% of the representatives were women, falling behind the target. This is due to the fact that some areas do not pay attention to the training of women at the lowest level, nor promoting them to the leadership role.<sup>40</sup> This in turn is influenced by traditional culture and church traditions.

With regard to the administration of sacraments, some village female pastors, though ordained, are not allowed to administer baptism or the eucharist.<sup>41</sup> In a certain metropolitan church, the eucharist is administered by men; females are only allowed to do preparatory work.<sup>42</sup>

With regard to decision-making and shepherding, there is still not much in which women can participate. Though 70% to 80% of church members are female and they are in charge of most of the work, some church leaders still consider it inappropriate for women to preach.<sup>43</sup>

In matters concerning the admission of seminarians and the calling of ministers, some local seminaries have the regulation that women can be admitted only if they score higher than men in the

entrance examination. Some churches do not accept female seminarians, considering them to be cowardly.<sup>44</sup> Some do not want female ministers, because they will be pregnant, thus affecting their service, are not physically strong, and have problem doing visits at night.<sup>45</sup> These reasons are very similar to those offered by companies in society.

Based on our interviews and the opinions of many church leaders, the causes of these limitations are:<sup>46</sup> 1) church tradition and structure; 2) low educational standard of women; 3) conservative interpretation of faith, reinforced by traditional culture; 4) low self-esteem of women.<sup>47</sup>

The role of women in social and church structure has been traditionally assisting men, who are the leaders. In the present social situation, women have less opportunity than men to receive education, resulting in their lower educational standard, thus it is not easy for them to climb up into the leadership level. Traditional culture causes Chinese Christians to be more receptive to conservative faith. Thus Paul teaches that men are heads and leaders of the church, and women should be subservient to men as they are subservient to the Lord, and be good helpers. These teachings work together with the tradition of "men being superior" to shape the self-image of women, giving them a low self-esteem, making them willing to be helpers and not to exercise their gifts.

### C. Women's Difficulties

There are other difficulties women in church have to face other than the limitations in ministry. They are biologically and psychologically different from men, and have their special needs, about which most churches cannot show their concern.<sup>48</sup> There are usually no special meetings or groups for women, except in a resourceful metropolis like Shanghai, Guangzhou, Hangzhou, etc.<sup>49</sup>

Not a few of the female preachers feel the workload is too heavy, pressure from traditional culture too great, and a lack of care and support.<sup>50</sup> So there is the saying that "it is difficult to be a preacher, but it is even more difficult to be a female preacher."<sup>51</sup>

Just like women in society, the difficulties of female workers in church come mainly from traditional culture and the social situation.<sup>52</sup>

1) Traditional culture: When a man neglects the family and serves the church, this is usually taken as an expression of love to the Lord. But a woman doing the same thing will be considered a poor Christian. If a female minister is sent out to work in other districts, leaving her husband and family behind, she will be criticized for neglecting the family. But very often when she takes care of the family, she will again be criticized for neglecting the church. If a female pastor is single, she will be considered unsociable and weird.



A divorced woman cannot be ordained, but a divorced man can. The self-image of female ministers is usually low, as they are used to be subservient to the male.<sup>53</sup>

2) Working and family situations: There are numerous female Christians in church, and hence the workload of female ministers is very heavy. They find it inconvenient to make evening visits, but some Christians are not so considerate and criticize them. In the family, they often have to take care of both church work and farming, and do not have enough time for husbands and children. If husbands are inconsiderate, divorces easily ensue.<sup>54</sup>

## **D. Women's Contribution**

In various journal articles reporting on Christian lives in the past decade, we discover that female Christians, despite the limitations of traditional culture and social situation, have still committed themselves to the Lord because of their experience of God's love, and have made great contributions to the church.

### **1. Lay Women and Female Leaders**

As the Chinese church is developing rapidly and there are not enough pastors and preachers, volunteers have to be responsible for a majority of the shepherding and evangelistic ministry, and among them most are female.<sup>55</sup>



Some female Christians are totally dedicated to the Lord's ministry, sacrificing their own energy and riches to the help of others. Because of their good testimonies in loving others, taking care of patients as if they were their own relatives, and looking after despondent elderly as if they were their own parents, many are converted.<sup>56</sup>

Some female Christians work faithfully in their own posts, bringing many to faith and building up the church.<sup>57</sup> Some dare every hardship in travelling around to raise money for the building of a church.<sup>58</sup> Some offer up all their profits in contractual business to support the church.<sup>59</sup> Some sweat and labour to build up the church by their own hands.<sup>60</sup>

Some serve the Lord in praying faithfully for decades for the church, and their devotional lives incite many fellow Christians to faith.<sup>61</sup>

Some take up the heavy burden of pastoral ministry without the guidance of preachers, going out to preach and to visit, and to pray for the sick. They become important ministers of the church.<sup>62</sup>

## **2. Female Preachers and Pastors**

Some female ministers serve the Lord faithfully for decades despite the meagre salary and hardship, and have committed

themselves with their money totally to the Lord.<sup>63</sup> They love the Lord and love people, have good spirituality, lead religious lives, and serve Christians as if they were their own parents and children. Their faith inspires many believers.<sup>64</sup>

Some suffer for the Lord in making evangelistic tours in various villages and provinces, bearing the hardship of hunger and cold for the sake of bringing others to faith.<sup>65</sup> Some challenge difficulties in establishing volunteer training courses, churches and seminaries.<sup>66</sup>

Some travel widely in helping the poor and needy, and become good examples in society.<sup>67</sup>



Generally speaking, women in church are still facing various kinds of limitations and difficulties, and need the special care of the church. Because of the shortage of ministers, a majority of the evangelistic and shepherding ministry falls to the volunteers, most of whom are women. Despite all kinds of difficulties, they commit themselves to the ministry, for the growth of the church.

## Section Two : The Church's Concern for Women

The Chinese Christian church has made an active and inspirational contribution to women's liberation. It advocates sexual equality, frees women from oppressions like foot-binding and prostitution, and raises the educational standard of women by running schools for women and training women professionals. It has made an impact on society in four areas:<sup>68</sup>

1) On feminism: Many protestants are committed to the advocacy of sexual equality. In *The Global Magazine and a Review of the Times* founded in Shanghai, many articles on women's issues have been published, condemning foot-binding and the drowning of babies, criticizing marriage controls in church, advocating education of women, and introducing western ideas of women's education, women joining the army, and women becoming professionals such as doctors and teachers, etc. Many recent Chinese reformers got their ideas of sexual equality from the missionaries.

2) On recent women's education:<sup>69</sup> Women's education initiated from the schools for women run by missionaries, half a century earlier than similar schools run by local people. In 1844, Ms. Ernst J. Eitel was sent by the British Presbyterian Educational Association for Oriental Women to set up a women's boarding school in Ningbo, attracting students through free tuition and

boarding, as well as giving allowance to students' families. In this way poor girls could also receive an education. There were more students in women's schools of the church than in those run by locals. Thus the earliest female professionals came mostly from church schools. The appearance of female teachers, female doctors and female nurses has made changes on traditional modes of life of women, and has also had great impact in many ways.

3) On the social milieu: Western missionaries made serious attacks on foot-binding, smoking, prostitution and gambling. Besides, church bodies have been established based on the promotion of social ethics. For example, the Chinese Women Self-control Society was established for the purpose of forbidding smoking, drinking and prostitution, and enhancing women's rights. The YMCA has the objective of serving women, providing services in the areas of education, culture, social life and career training.

4) On social welfare: Missionaries have organized hospitals for women, propagating knowledge of modern gynaecology. The church has also established hostels for abandoned children, orphans, elderly and handicapped women.

There has been a change in the relationship between church and society after the liberation. The church has not been as much involved in social services, but it still has a great concern for women's situations.



## **A. Promoting the Status of Women within the Church**

How can the church promote the status of women in church and society? From our interviews and the opinions of some church leaders, the issue should be handled in five areas.

1) Planned training of female leaders and pastors: The Chinese church is actively ordaining female pastors and electing women into the leadership level.<sup>70</sup> The church can also mobilize women through giving them planned training on culture, and skills in leadership and ministry,<sup>71</sup> so that women can exercise their gifts, have their self-image affirmed, and become more effective in taking care of the needs of women. The Chinese Christian Women's Ministry Committee<sup>72</sup> has been established for these particular tasks. Many churches have also organized women's committees, women's literacy classes and women's service groups. Some even hold forums on women's issues regularly.<sup>73</sup>

2) Teaching of a correct relationship between the genders: Some church leaders with foresight bring into the church the fruit of recent Biblical studies on sexual equality, and introduce western feminist theology, thus correcting traditional concepts.<sup>74</sup> The course on feminist theology was first offered in Nanjing Union Seminary in 1993, arousing the interest of both the lecturers and students in this area.<sup>75</sup>



3) Boosting the self-image of women: Feudalistic conscience has created in women a mentality of self-contempt and withdrawal.<sup>76</sup> Women's liberation should not be an imitation of men, otherwise it will still be male-centred. Instead it should be a boosting of the self-image of women and the building up of an independent character.<sup>77</sup> The Women's Federation has been promoting the principle of four-self: self-honour, self-respect, self-reliance, self-strengthening. Christian women should also grow in these four aspects in order to be admired by others in church and society.<sup>78</sup>

4) Cooperating with men: Feudalistic structure and ideas, not men, are the enemies of women.<sup>79</sup> So women and men should work together, serving God with each other's peculiarity and gifts, facing social problems and fighting for justice and righteousness.<sup>80</sup>

5) Facing society:<sup>81</sup> Being members of society, Christians have the responsibility of promoting the social status of women, because the problems of women in society and in the church are very closely related. If the social status of women can be raised, many problems of women in the church can also be solved.<sup>82</sup>

## **B. Contribution to Women in Society**

### **1. Examples of Female Christians**

It is generally true that Chinese Christians consider spirituality to be isolated from politics and society.<sup>83</sup> However, Chinese female

Christians possess a new life in Christ, manifested in selfless love and good conducts. Their testimonies deeply influence their neighbours and society.<sup>84</sup> They believe their faithfulness to the Lord should be shown in their daily lives. So they have excellent performance at work and become model workers. Some even have made outstanding contributions to the country and society.<sup>85</sup>

In 1988, 16,556 ministers and believers received the progressive work award.<sup>86</sup> In the past it was believed that one more Christian meant one fewer Chinese. Now it is believed that one more church, means two fewer prisons.<sup>87</sup>

## **2. The Church's Concern for Women**

Besides the contribution of individual female Christians to society, the church and relevant Christian bodies are also serving women in society.

Women of the Hangzhou church serve the despondent elderly in hospitals, visiting orphans in public orphanages, and spend half-day a week for free hair-cutting service. Their love has given good witnesses to the Lord and earned good reputations in society.<sup>88</sup> Church women in Chengdu are well-known for their tender and meticulous service in child-care, reducing the worry of women.<sup>89</sup>

Women of the Guangzhou church have formed a volunteering

medical service group, providing free diagnosis and prescription for patients.<sup>90</sup> The Women's group of the Guangzhou church council has cooperated with the city women's federation and city council's women's association in the election of progressive women on March 8 Women's Day, and has also participated in social services such as medical advisory service, infant education advisory service, and hair-cutting for children.<sup>91</sup>

The Amity Foundation is an independent civil organization formed by Chinese Christians.<sup>92</sup> Its main target is not serving women, so it does not tackle all of their problems. But it has offered special training classes for women and established textile and artifact factories, providing job opportunities for women.<sup>93</sup>

At the second international conference on social work, the Amity Foundation decided to show further concern for women's issues, undertaking studies on the social phenomenon of females being mal-treated, and looking for ways to solve the problems.<sup>94</sup> Its "return-to-school project" deals especially with the problems of handicapped children and mal-treated girls returning to school, providing them with financial support.<sup>95</sup> Recently the Amity Foundation has offered job training courses for women in various areas,<sup>96</sup> providing working opportunities for them,<sup>97</sup> thus enabling them to be economically independent and have a higher social status.

The YWCA,<sup>98</sup> ever since its organization in 1923, initiated the

attack upon the concept that the "uneducated women is virtuous." They established schools for women, attacked foot-binding, and advocated physical education for women.<sup>99</sup>

Before the liberation, the YWCA worked unceasingly among female workers, establishing labour schools to educate women and arousing their awareness to self-liberation. They also offered a lot of job opportunities to help women to be economically independent, provided job training and placement service, and ran services like women's hostels and economic canteens. In the forties, they also provided child-care services to relieve women from their burdens.

During the war, the YWCA motivated women to participate in the war, and organized women's battlefield service groups for the relief of refugees and students. After the liberation, they also united women of all areas for the promotion of cultural education and recreational activities, improving their education and opening up their horizons.<sup>100</sup>



Generally speaking, Christian concern for women both inside and outside the church is continually increasing. Good advice has been raised in our interviews that the church should set an example

in raising the status of women in the church. Through the exercise of gifts, the self-esteem of women can be enhanced. Through publications, the church can give correct teachings on the relationship between the genders. The church can also help women's organizations, civil and social service organizations in the raising of women's status. For example, Christian Women's Committee can work with the Women's Federation.



## Concluding Comments

To conclude, the status of women in the church has been greatly raised compared to that before the liberation. Despite certain limitations and difficulties, they continue to serve faithfully and make contributions. In society women can hold up half of the sky; in church they can hold up a major portion of the sky. Their contribution to church growth cannot be ignored.

Church leaders have also begun to study women's issues from theoretical aspects of women's liberation and feminism, and have established institutions for the concern of women and organized women to care for needs of the church and society. We believe that in the near future the Chinese church can formulate its own contextual feminist theology, responding to Chinese traditional culture and social tradition, and effectively solving women's problems in church and society.<sup>101</sup> Although Christians are a minority in China, the church is trying its best to serve the community. This should be appreciated.

## Chapter Notes

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<sup>1</sup>We have collected scores of testimonies of female Christians and more than ten articles on the situation of women in the church.

<sup>2</sup>We understand that this reliance on quality interviews, articles and personal testimonies cannot give a wholistic and general picture, but its advantage is that it can give more in-depth description. We think more interviews of various types should be carried out. In order to be more wholistic and objective, we have selected interviews from various districts of China, and the articles and personal testimonies are also from various journals collected over a decade.

<sup>3</sup>These journals include *Tien Feng*, *Bridge*, *China and Church* and *Watching for China*.

<sup>4</sup>Chen Jianguang & Alan Hunter, *A Strong Movement in the Making: Protestants in China, 1990* (Hong Kong: Tien Dao, 1992), p.11.

<sup>5</sup>Pamphlet on Chinese female Christians (Shanghai: Chinese Christian Council, 1995). Others have made estimations from 25 million to 50 million. See Bi Ming, "A Macroscopic View of Christian Fever in Mainland China," *China and Church* vol.98 (1994), p.3.

<sup>6</sup>Chen & Hunter, *ibid.*, pp.8-9.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.14-15.

<sup>8</sup>Paul E. Kauffman, *Piecing Together the Church Puzzle*, trans. Lin Shengwen (Taipei: Olive Christian Foundation, 1989), p.71.

<sup>9</sup>Bi Ming, *ibid.*, pp.2-5. See also Wang Siyue, "Reasons for Church Growth in Mainland China from the Perspectives of Politics and Social Environment," *China and Church*, vol.98 (1994), pp.6-9.

<sup>10</sup>Religious Research Centre of the China Social Science Institute points out that the main reason for rapid church growth in villages is that "people want to be freed from the sufferings caused by illnesses." Miracles fulfill their need. See Ed. "On Village Church Again," *Bridge* vol.28 (1988), pp.15-16.

<sup>11</sup>Ming, "The Reason of Church Growth from the View of Liaodong," *Bridge* vol.37 (1989), pp.6-8.

<sup>12</sup>There may be many reasons for young people to attend church meetings. Some may be curious, some expect to have some advantage, while others may be observing or criticizing. But when they attend church meetings, they are attracted by the solemn atmosphere and the beautiful melody of the hymns, and most important of all, they find in the church harmonious personal relationships. See Sheng, "Why do

Young People Believe?" *Bridge* vol.11 (1985), pp.14-16.

<sup>13</sup>There are both positive and negative effects of overseas evangelistic broadcasts upon the Chinese church. On the positive side, the church grows and the believers are edified. Negatively, this violates the self-propagation principle, and its message may not suit the need of Chinese Christians.

<sup>14</sup>LWF China research project research team results.

<sup>15</sup>When villagers are converted, they have a peaceful mind and love toward others, following the teaching of the Bible. They know how to live peacefully with neighbours, and simplify the ceremonies of wedding and funeral. They are often praised for "becoming civilized." See "On Village Church Again," pp.15-16.

<sup>16</sup>Chen Jianguang et al., "A Comparative Study of China-Hong Kong Female Seminarians," *China Graduate School of Theology Bulletin* vol.19 (1995.7), pp.42-43.

<sup>17</sup>LWF Chinese research project research team results. The research is only at the beginning stage. Further study is needed.

<sup>18</sup>Ed., "Most Recent Statistical Data of the two Christian Councils (up to the end of 1988)," *Bridge* vol.28 (1989), p.3.

<sup>19</sup>Pamphlet on Chinese Women.

<sup>20</sup>Most pastors are either over 55 years old or below 35. Pastors ordained in the past two years are mainly between 20 and 30. From this we notice an age gap. See ed., "Lifting the Shroud of the Chinese Church," *Watching for China* vol. 121 (1994), pp.2-4.

<sup>21</sup>Pastors have often expressed difficulty in shepherding. A pastor in Zhengzhou reveals that he has to be in charge of more than 100 meeting points of his congregation. The workload of preaching, trainings and conferences is already very tight, and it becomes very demanding to take care of the Christians in the meeting points. Christians hunger for the Word and beg the pastor to stay and deliver more sermons. Some even rise up at midnight, prepare their own food and then walk tens of miles in order to attend the service. Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Lay leaders generally have a lot of opportunities to preach, following the books of sermons published by the church. In order to equip themselves, they actively attend training courses, which are usually intensive, lasting from 20 days to 1 month. Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Chen & Hunter, *ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>24</sup>Before 1949, most women did not have the opportunity to be educated, and hence a great proportion of believers were illiterate. The



pastor of a village church 50 miles away from Shanghai tells that half of the members do not know how to read or sing. Many village churches are extremely poor, and the education standard of members very low. Life is difficult there. Ibid., p.17. Among the 270,000 Christians in Huaiyang city, illiterate or barely-literate members amount to nearly 200,000, about 74% of the total. See Sha Guangyi, "A Statistical Study of the Christian Church in North and South Jiangsu," *Religion* vols. 29-30 (combined, 1995), p.102.

<sup>25</sup>Although most believers have low educational standard, some have received secondary and tertiary education, and some are even professionals. See Chen & Hunter, *ibid.*, p.17.

<sup>26</sup>There are three levels of seminaries, namely, national, diocesan and provincial. The Nanjing Union Seminary is of the national level, while there are five diocesan seminaries, namely, Eastern China, Beijing, Northern China, Mid-south, and Sichuan Seminaries. The seven provincial seminaries are Zhejiang, Fujian, Guangdong Union, Anhui, Shandong, Shanxi and Yunnan. See Pamphlet on Chinese Female Christians.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>One seminary has been led by a woman for many years. One-third of those who are sent to study abroad are female. There are

national leaders in the YWCA. See Arvind Sharma ed., *Today's Woman in World Religions* (New York: State University of New York, 1994), p.197.

<sup>29</sup>Lu Ping & Qiushi, "Volunteers: an important force of the church," *Tien Feng* (1994.7), pp.8-10. See also Li Lancheng, "Deeply Rooted and Bearing Fruit: volunteer training program in Liuhe County," *Tien Feng* (1992.6), p.22.

<sup>30</sup>Chinese Bibles are printed by the Amity Press. A person in charge of the Press tells that more than 10 million Bible have been printed by July this year. Lingban, "A Celebration in Nanjing for the 10 millionth copy of Bible by the Amity Press," *Tien Feng* (1995.10), p.49.

<sup>31</sup>15,000 volunteers have been trained through this course. Up to the end of 88, 630 courses had been held, which more than 33,000 people attended. The emphasis of this course is on Biblical study and systematic theology. See Chen & Hunter, *ibid.*, p.55.

<sup>32</sup>LWF Chinese research project research team results. It has been pointed out that the Chinese church differs from the Western church in that, instead of leading in social conscience as is the case in the West, the Chinese church is led to reform by society.

<sup>33</sup>Cao Shenjie, "The Role of the Church in the Lives of Women," *Decade Link* no. 15 (1994.7), p.15.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p.16.

<sup>35</sup>Gao Ying, "The Place of Women in the Church in China-- focus on personal experience," *In God's Image* vol.13 (1994), pp.56-60.

<sup>36</sup>LWF China research project research team results.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup>They have female pastors shepherding them. At the leadership level, among the 23 church committee members, 15 are women, occupying 65%; among the 47 three-self committee members, 51% are women. In quantity, females are the majority. With respect to practical work, females are also in charge of a majority of the church work. See Yu Wenhui, "Half of the Sky in the Chinese Church," *Bridge* vol.7 (1984.9), pp.16-17.

<sup>39</sup>There are 29 female coworkers in the church, including those on sick leave and retirement. Of the 22 in office, 9 are in public offices: 1 provincial councillor, 1 city councillor, 1 city representative, 1 district representative, 2 district councillors, 1 city youth representative and 2 district youth representatives. This is comparable to the 11 male coworkers holding public offices. Church women have also made a

contribution through their participation in the leadership level, denoting the raising of women's status in church. Out of the 79 two-association committee members elected on the seventh assembly of representatives, 32 are women, occupying 40.5%. Of the 34 standing committee members, 12 are women, 38%. Of the 16 executive committee members, four are women, making a quarter of the leaders. Among them are 2 vice-chairpersons and a chief executive. See Lin Suan, "Women of the Guangzhou Church Active in the Way of Loving the Nation and Loving the Church," *Tien Feng* (1992.5), pp.8-9.

<sup>40</sup>Yin Shang & Cao Shengjie, "Let Women have Greater Influence," *Tien Feng* (1994.3), pp.29-31.

<sup>41</sup>Cao Shengjie, "From Accompanying a Representative Group of the Asian Christian Women's Council to the Women's Ministry of our Country," *Tien Feng* (1994.9), pp.20-21.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.* Rev. Gao Ying has also pointed out that in the church women are only allowed to prepare bread and wine for the eucharist and to clean up afterwards, but are barred from its administration. She objected to no effect, and was not allowed to administer the eucharist even after she was ordained, until once when she was assigned to replace a sick pastor. After six months she got the opportunity again, but the congregation was requested to sit according to gender, just because the eucharist was administered by a woman. This reflects that feminism in



the church is not as advanced as that in society. See Gao Ying, "The Place of Women in the Church in China," *Decade Link* no. 15 (1994.7), p.16.

<sup>43</sup>Pong Yaqian, "New Beginnings of Women's Ministry: the first women's ministry committee meeting," *Tien Feng* (1994.5), p.14.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup>LWF China research project research team results.

<sup>46</sup>Jin Wei, vice-executive of YWCA, Rev. Shi Yujian, Rev. Cao Shengjie and Wang Huaxing have similar views. See also Shen Gao & Si Lu, "Women are not Weaker than Men: an open discourse among women," *Tien Feng* (1992.3), p.44. Cao Shengjie, "One more Step in the Women's Ministry of our Church," *Tien Feng* (1989.1), p.11. Cao Shengjie, "From Accompanying a Representative Group of the Asian Christian Women's Council to the Women's Ministry of our Country," *Tien Feng* (1994.9), pp.20-21.

<sup>47</sup>Rev. Cao Shengjie points out that female Christians love the Lord and participate actively in church ministry. So some say that the saying "women can hold up half of the sky" should be modified in the church to "women can hold up a major portion of the sky." But the participation of female pastors and volunteers at the leadership level is not much. This is certainly related to the less education received by



women and the lower educational standard. But it is also due to women's own psychological hindrance of self-contempt. See Cao Shengjie, "One more Step in the Women's Ministry of our Church," p.11.

<sup>48</sup>Cao Shengjie, "From Accompanying a Representative Group of the Asian Christian Women's Council to the Women's Ministry of our Country," pp.20-21.

<sup>49</sup>LWF China research project research team results.

<sup>50</sup>Female preacher Yie Xiaolian said, "As a female preacher, I find the work very difficult. The church is influenced by feudalistic ideas still existing in villages, and some places do not allow women to preach or to participate in church management. It will be even difficult after marriage. There are often conflicts between family work and church ministry. They have to exert double effort in order to do well, and they long to have the care and support of other coworkers in the church." See Shen Gao & Si Lu, *ibid.*, p.44.

<sup>51</sup>Wang Ziqi & Huang Zhe, "On their Shoulders are Burdens Men have never Carried: interview of female coworkers," *Tien Feng* (1994.3), pp.27-28.

<sup>52</sup>An incident will show their difficulties and how the church helps them. After Chen Tingting graduated from the Zhejiang

Seminary, she serves in Zhejiang. Her church is traditional, emphasizing that women should be gentle, obedient, and show respect to parents-in-law. On the other hand, there are no male co-workers and the church needs her leadership. Under these dual expectation, she gains the church's acceptance and wins as well for her family the reputation of a model family. But she has to pay a great price. Not only does she have to be in charge of the demanding ministry of three meeting points, Bible studies, weddings and funerals, festivals, prayer meetings and training courses (many of the meetings are at night), she also needs to take care of her parents-in-law, doing house work and farm work. Luckily, she has the consideration of the deacons, and all the church meetings are so arranged as to match the schedule of her house work, so that she can also fulfill her responsibility as a housewife. Her husband is also very supportive and helps her out at a lot of house work, so that she can serve the church in peace. See Arvind Sharma ed., *Today's Woman in World Religions* (New York: State University, 1994), pp.200-202.

<sup>53</sup>LWF China research project research team results.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid. Facing with these difficulties, it has been pointed out that the church can provide care and financial support during the nursing period, as well as granting monthly leaves of absence. The husband's support is also very important, in being sharers, private secretary, and family helper. See Wang Ziqi & Huang Zhe, *ibid.*,

pp.27-28. See also Tien Tongxin, "My Honour: my wife is a preacher," *Tien Feng* (1994.3), p.31.

<sup>55</sup>Scholars point out that there are many female itinerant preachers in China, serving faithfully in evangelizing and shepherding, making contributions to the church. See Paul Kauffman, trans. Lin Shengwen, *ibid.*, pp.124-130.

<sup>56</sup>There is a female Christian who brings warmth and light to people around wherever she lives. She treats with love whoever she meets, no matter if they are poor or rich, blind or crippled, orphans or widows, even those hated by all, and preaches the gospel to them all. She continued to do the same even during the Cultural Revolution. See Dang Huiming, "Remembering my Mother," *Tien Feng* (1992.5), p.30. See also Dong Chuanyi, "Ms. Ying, the Peace-maker," *Tien Feng* (1993.7), pp.18-19. See also Deng Lingyong, "Half of the Sky in Eastern Fujian Church," *Tien Feng* (1995.7), p.23. See also Zhang Shenghua, "A Sister who loves the Lord and Others," *Tien Feng* (1994.11), p.25.

<sup>57</sup>Presbyter Ms. Xu Chuizhen spreads the gospel where she works, bringing scores of people to Christ, and building up the church. See Ed., "The Testimony of Presbyter Xu Chuizhen," *Bridge* vol.59 (1993), pp.9-12. See also Huang Enju, "The Lord uses an Illiterate Old Woman," *Watching for China* vol.122 (1994.9), p.8. See also Meng

En, "A Wonderful Woman in Grace," *China and Church* vol.79 (1990.9), pp.31-33.

<sup>58</sup>Most of the believers of the Yichuan church are elderly women. When they applied to the village committee for land to build the church, they were mocked, and were given some land which no one wanted. Yet they were not afraid of hardship and joined hands in building up the church. People were amazed and said, "Christianity is magnificent. Even grannies can build a church." Cao Huiyun, "Anecdotes of the Gracious Deeds of the Sisters of the Yichuan Church," *Tien Feng* (1995.7), p.21. See also Chui Dawei, "Sister Zhang Zaoxian, Zealous for the Lord," *Tien Feng* (1989.8), p.25.

<sup>59</sup>Ms. Wang Cunyan of Helongjiang has to take care of a sick father over 70 and two young daughters. For the sake of church independence, she started a restaurant, taking care of everything by herself, and sacrificing herself for the benefit of other workers. The restaurant makes an annual profit of 12,000 yuan, winning her also the respect of fellow Christians. See Liu Junliang, "Our Miser: Wang Cunyan," *Tien Feng* (1988.8), p.22. See also Ping Genchang, "They Provide the Church with their own Hands," *Tien Feng* (1993.2). p.17-18.

<sup>60</sup>When Chuanqu Island of Fujian was going to build a church, all church members were mobilized. Besides taking care of daily



family chores and looking after children, female Christians also mended fishing nets and carried construction materials. See Tien Yu, "Trilogy of Fishing Girls," *Tien Feng* (1994.8), p.18.

<sup>61</sup>Ms Wu Yunqing is the widow of Rev. Joseph Shi of Jesus Church at Fengxian county, Shanghai. She dedicated herself to the Lord at 17, and has been serving loyally for over seventy years. All those who meet her can sense the never-tiring and never-ending love radiating from her. Her secret is to rise up at 2 in the morning, pray for four or five hours. She is very willing to exhort and help others, doing her best for the poor elderly women who come for help. See Shi Guorong, "Love Never Ends," *Tien Feng* (1993.9), p.18. See also Wei Kun, "Second Auntie who reads the Bible with Five Eyes," *Bridge* vol. 47 (1991), pp.10-11. See also Tang, "Unbroken Heart," *Bridge* vol. 46 (1991), pp.12-14.

<sup>62</sup>There are over 1000 Christians in Hezhe city of Shandong, but they have no pastors. Whenever she has the time, Ms. Lan will go out to evangelize and pray for the sick. Within a year's time she has served nearly 200 Christians in the 12 villages nearby. See ed., "A Group of Young Preachers in Hezhe," *Bridge* vol.61 (1993), pp.3-6. See also Deng Lingyong, *ibid.*, p.23.

<sup>63</sup>Rev. Yu Baozhen of Loyuan has served the Lord faithfully for over four decades. Her salary was meagre, her work difficult, and she



suffered for the Lord during the Cultural Revolution, but she has never forsaken her calling from heaven. After the Cultural Revolution, she travelled for the sake of building a church. She treated believers as her children, and looked after young preachers with care. At her death, she offered all of her saving to the church. See Zheng Xiaogui, "Faithful until Death," *Tien Feng* (1992.4), p.28. See also Pong Mu, "Zhang Zheng, a Pious Old Lady at 100," *Tien Feng* (1986.7), p.18. See also Chongsheng, "Remembering my dear Mother," *China and Church* vol.93 (1993), pp.27-29.

<sup>64</sup>Ms. Wang Delu of Kaifeng, Henan, remains single for life to serve the Lord. She has a zeal for the Lord, as well as for theological education and devotion. Every morning she insists on morning watch. She is sincere, benevolent to others and strict to herself, and courageous in confessing her faults. She lives frugally, but is generous in helping others. See Tang Weiming, "She Incites Us to Serve Well," *Tien Feng* (1994.9), p.43. See also Lord's Maid, "Dust in the Ocean," *China and Church* vol.77 (1990), pp.29-30. See also Lin Qinwen, "Ms. Zhao and her Bible Literacy Course," *Tien Feng* (1993.3), p.14.

<sup>65</sup>Ms Tien Xiuyun tours around provinces and villages to preach the gospel, brings people to the Lord, and run training courses. She has to suffer hunger and cold and has no shelter to live in. See Tien Xiuyun, "Home Nowhere, Home Everywhere," *China and Church* vol.64 (1988), p.25-26.

<sup>66</sup>Ms. Wei Ruan of the Xiling Church was called by the Lord to preach the gospel in remote areas. She has served for more than 30 years, and was imprisoned for four years. Being restored in 1980, she resumed her work, which began with a few, but reached more than 500 when the church was built in 1984. See Zhao Dengyao, "Happiness and Sorrow of the Northwestern Churches," *Bridge* vol.38 (1989), pp.4-5. See also Tien Yu, "The Setting Sun," *Tien Feng* (1995.7), pp.18-19. See also Rong Rong, "Farming for the Lord at Longchuan," *Tien Feng* (1995.7), p.20.

<sup>67</sup>Rev. Dai Lizheng of Shanghai Grace Church shepherds Christians as a tender mother and was greatly respected. She has also contribution to society and was acclaimed as the Shanghai 83 March 8 Red Flagger. See Yu Wenwei, "Half of the Sky in the Chinese Church," *Bridge* vol.7 (1984.9), pp.16-17. See also Wu Chaochien, "Sharing the Warmth of Love: Wang Yufen, the one who likes to help," *Tien Feng* (1990.5), p.27.

<sup>68</sup>Zheng Yongfu & Lu Meiyi, *Lives of Contemporary Chinese Women* (Henan: People's Publishing, 1993), pp.241-254.

<sup>69</sup>See also Xiao Anping, "The Influence of Church-run Universities and Hospitals on China's Modernization," *Chinese Theological Review* (1989), pp.49-54.

<sup>70</sup>This can be seen from the rapid increase in number of female pastors and the requirement of the fifth Annual Conference to have the representatives elected according to proportion of gender.

<sup>71</sup>Rev. Cao Shengjie thinks attention should be paid to the equipping of women, so that women can be organized to work on the basis of prayer, devotion and serving the church. Cao, "One more Step to the Women's Ministry of our Church," p.11.

<sup>72</sup>Becoming aware of the importance of feminist theology, women's ministry and the status and function of women in church, the Chinese church set up the Chinese Christian Women's Ministry Committee in November, 1993. 22 committee members were elected, and the first meeting was held on 1-3 March, 1994 in Shanghai. Representatives briefed the group on their local situations of women's ministry, shared their experiences, discussed the issue of status in church, and set up working targets for the Committee. Sun Meici, "Feminism in Contemporary China," (term paper for the course "Contemporary Chinese Women" offered at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Spring 1995). Ms. Sun is a member of the Committee. The meeting has also decided to do surveys on female Christians so as to understand concretely the situation of women and to plan for future work. See Pong Yaqian, *ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>73</sup>Lin Suan, *ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>74</sup>Rev. Gao Ying thinks it appropriate that the fruit of modern Biblical studies on sexual equality should be taught in the church, so as to correct its traditional concept. Gao Ying, "The Place of Women in the Church in China," *Decade Link* no. 15 (1994.7), p.16. Bishop Ding Guangxun first introduced feminist theology to the Nanjing Union Seminary in 1982. In 1985, he interpreted God from the feminist perspective in his speech at the Seminary, that "God is not masculine." See Sun Meici, *ibid.*

<sup>75</sup>Female lecturer Pong Yaqian began to offer the course on feminist theology at Nanjing Union Seminary in 1993. Attention was aroused to feminist concerns and to the search for contextualized feminist theology. See Sun Meici, *ibid.* Ms Sun is a Chinese female pastor studying at present at the Hong Kong Lutheran Theological Seminary for an M.Div. She is very interested in feminist theology.

<sup>76</sup>Yin Shang & Cao Shengjie, *ibid.*, pp.29-31.

<sup>77</sup>LWF China research project research team results.

<sup>78</sup>Yin Shang & Cao Shengjie, *ibid.*, pp.29-31.

<sup>79</sup>Cao Shengjie, "What Womanhood means to Us in New China," *China Notes* vol. xxiv, no.2 & 3 (Spring/Summer 1986),



pp.392-393.

<sup>80</sup>Yin Shang & Cao Shengjie, *ibid.*, pp.29-31.

<sup>81</sup>Jin Wei, vice-secretary of YWCA, points out that Western churches are very sensitive to women's issues and are concerned with issues both within and outside the church. The Chinese church should do likewise. *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup>Chen & Hunter, *ibid.*, pp.36-53.

<sup>84</sup>Zhang Xianxia is a volunteer church worker. One day on her way to church, she saw a child on the rail and a train was running swiftly toward her. In order to save the child she was knocked to death by the train. This spirit of sacrifice affects the villagers. See Huang Baoan, "Zhang Xianxia Died for a Child," *Tien Feng* (1990.1), p.22. In Hebei, Wang Xianglan, Niu Rongjin, Li Bizhen and Liang Fenfang picked up a handicapped abandoned baby on the way to church. They kept the baby, and endeavoured to find a welfare organization for the baby. Their love has made a certain impact on society, and the good behaviour of Christians is proclaimed. See Liang Peiyu, "Be Good Samaritans," *Tien Feng* (1993.9), p.17. See also Zhong Fusheng, "Caring for the Handicapped even better than a Mother," *Tien Feng* (1992.5), p.20. See also ed., "Tender Mother spreads tender Love,"



*Bridge* vol.64 (1994.4), pp.15-16. Chen Ling of Henan has taken Ruth as her example ever since her baptism, and served her mother-in-law whole-heartedly. For four years her family has been acclaimed. When the mother-in-law was paralysed in 1982 and could not take care of herself, Chen served her in eating and drinking, combing and cleaning, as well as in sewage clean-up and other nursing care. When the old lady passed away in 1986, her relatives sent up a big mirror engraved "filial piety ever existing," and the son-in-law sent a flag written "virtuous wife." Village committee members ordered the mirror and flag to be hoisted in procession round the village in trumpets and drums, till they reached the house of Chen Ling. This aroused the whole village, and caused the appearance of a group of good daughters-in-law. See Gao Shengjie, "Virtuous Wife Chen Ling," *Tien Feng* (1987.6), p.19. Also Tien Qiu, "My Mother," *Tien Feng* (1990.7), p.24.

<sup>85</sup>Ms. Wu, besides taking care of her mother-in-law and children, raises ducks and pigs successfully with a special method. She shared her method with others selflessly, and contributed part of her profits to the country. So she was several times acclaimed as "the capable woman" and "March 8 red flagger," and was elected representative to the Seventh National Women's Conference. Yu Zhuguang, "She has a good Testimony," *Tien Feng* (1994.4), pp.18-19.

<sup>86</sup>“Most Recent Statistics of the two Christian National Councils (up to the end of 1988),” p.3.

<sup>87</sup>LWF China research project research team results.

<sup>88</sup>Pong Yaqian, *ibid.*, p.14.

<sup>89</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>90</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>91</sup>Lin Suan, *ibid.*, pp.8-9. Also, female Christians of the Suichang county, Zhejiang, provided free clothes mending service on March 8, to the glory of God and the help of others. See Wang Xian, “Believers everywhere are imitating Leifeng,” *Tien Feng* (1990.6), p.31.

<sup>92</sup>The Amity Foundation is an independent civil organization formed by Chinese Christians in Nanjing in April, 1985, as a new type of Christian participation in social service. It works for the promotion of hygiene, education, and village welfare development, earning the support of society and friends abroad. See *Amity Bulletin* (Overseas ed.), vol.1 (1994.4), p.1.

<sup>93</sup>There is a textile factory specifically employing deaf women. An artifact factory in the Nanjing suburb also provides jobs for women and takes care of their health. But it is a pity that these job offerings are

still limited to the traditional categories for women, and women's participation in decision-making and leadership has been neglected. Having realized this, leaders of the Amity Foundation are actively planning to give priority training to women leaders. They will also respond to the problems faced by women at the grass-root level, provide skill training for them, and study their problems. They hope to make a contribution to women's liberation in China. See Tan Liying, "Women in China," *In God's Image* vol.13 no.4 (1994), p.5.

<sup>94</sup>*Amity Bulletin* vol.2 (1994.8), p.1.

<sup>95</sup>*Amity Bulletin* vol.4 (1995.4), p.1.

<sup>96</sup>Qiu Zhonghui, "Empowerment through Market Access," *Amity Newsletter* no.34/35 (Fall/Winter 1995), pp.1-2.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.2-4.

<sup>98</sup>The Chinese YWCA is a Christian community for women with over one hundred years' history in China. Its objective is "to promote moral, intellectual, physical and social development of women according to the Christian spirit, to nurture virtuous personality and social spirit, for the service of society and the benefit of humankind." It is not the same as a church, but is a church organization offering social service for women. Its members are not necessarily Christians, but there must be a certain proportion of Christians in the board of directors and in the staff.

See Gan Xianyong, "Chinese YWCA," *Tien Feng* (1995.7), p. 14.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

<sup>101</sup>Some female theologians of the Chinese church have the plan to study abroad. Pong Yaqian, the first one to offer the course on feminist theology in the seminary, plans to further study abroad on feminist theology. Rev. Sun Meici, also very concerned about feminist theology, is already studying at the Hong Kong Lutheran Theological Seminary.





## **Conclusion**

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Chinese women have been suffering from the oppression of traditional culture for almost two thousand years. Through the traditional concepts on morality, value judgment, marriage, sexual roles, education, cosmology and spiritual recompense, oppression is transmitted from generation to generation. And through the structures of law, marriage, customs and education, these traditional concepts are in turn sustained. The gravest effect of traditional culture is that it has shaped the self-image of women in general.

In the past forty years or more, the Chinese government has made a great contribution to women and has greatly raised their status. But with the coming of the economic reform, economic factors combine with traditional culture to create not a few difficulties for women today.

Women in the church, just like those in society, are faced with various kinds of difficulties. But they continue to serve faithfully, and the church continues to grow. Church leaders are very concerned about women issues, and are beginning to probe into the theories of women's liberation and feminist theology, and to take action in caring for the needs of women in society.

There are deficiencies in the theory and praxis of Chinese women's liberation, especially in their underestimation of and lack of concern for the influence of culture, and, as a result, many policies cannot be implemented effectively. But there is still much that we

can learn from their determination and methods. The methods the Chinese government uses in liberating women can serve as our reference, provided we know their limitations.

1) Since 1949, the Chinese government has made wholistic studies on how to legislate on sexual equality and protection of women and children.

2) The Chinese government encourages women to step outside the family and make their contribution to the country. This enables women to be economically independent, no longer relying on men. In this way the value of women is affirmed.

3) The Chinese government replaces the paternalism of traditional culture with the equality of socialism.

4) The Chinese government raises the educational standard of women through education and training.

5) The Chinese government increases the proportion of women in leadership through the method of proportional election.

6) The Chinese government utilizes national resources to establish women organizations for the offering of wholistic services to women.

Besides learning from the government, we can also learn from the Chinese church.

Chinese Christianity has been active in the inspiration of women's liberation. It advocates sexual equality and has freed women from oppression through concrete actions like attacking foot-binding and prostitution. It has also raised women's educational standard through the establishment of schools for women and the training of professional women.

After the liberation, there has been a change in the church-society relationship. The church no longer serves women through social services, but through the Christian care of neighbours, and through making contributions to society and country in faithful work. With economic reform, Christians gradually gain recognition in society through their beautiful testimonies in conduct and love, in family and at work. At the same time, Christian organizations like the YWCA and the Amity Foundation are providing services to women in society. Despite being only a minority in China, Christians are making a significant contribution in China. This is by no means an easy task.

There is much for us to learn in the forty years' experience of the Chinese church. In these years, the number of Christians has increased ten-fold, for reasons which deserve our study. The sacrifice and dedication of some pastors for the believers set an example for pastors in Hong Kong and abroad. The loyalty in faith of some pastors and believers under oppression is food for reflection for us who are living in comfort. The mode of priesthood of all

believers, realized in the shouldering of ministry by the laity, should continue to be stressed.

Chinese church women, faced with the oppression of traditional culture, the impact of social transformation, and the restrictions of church tradition, have made great contributions in the church, and have fulfilled their civil responsibilities, even to the extent of becoming social exemplars. This spirit of selfless commitment to faith ought to be learned by all believers.

To conclude, the Chinese government, based on materialism, has paid special attention to problems of the external environment that women are facing. Thus the status of women has been greatly raised with respect to employment, politics, education, law, family and marriage. But they have underestimated the influence of culture, thinking that an improvement in women's social situation will solve all of their problems. But we discover that even if the social situation is changed, culture still has deep influence upon people. This is especially obvious in villages, shaping the image of women.<sup>1</sup> If the problems raised by culture are not faced squarely, women cannot be completely liberated.

The Chinese church has joined women's liberation in action, and is beginning to study it in theory. If Chinese theologians want to construct a contextual feminist theology, the first chapter on culture, the second chapter on society and the third chapter on female Christians can offer some basic reference materials for research.

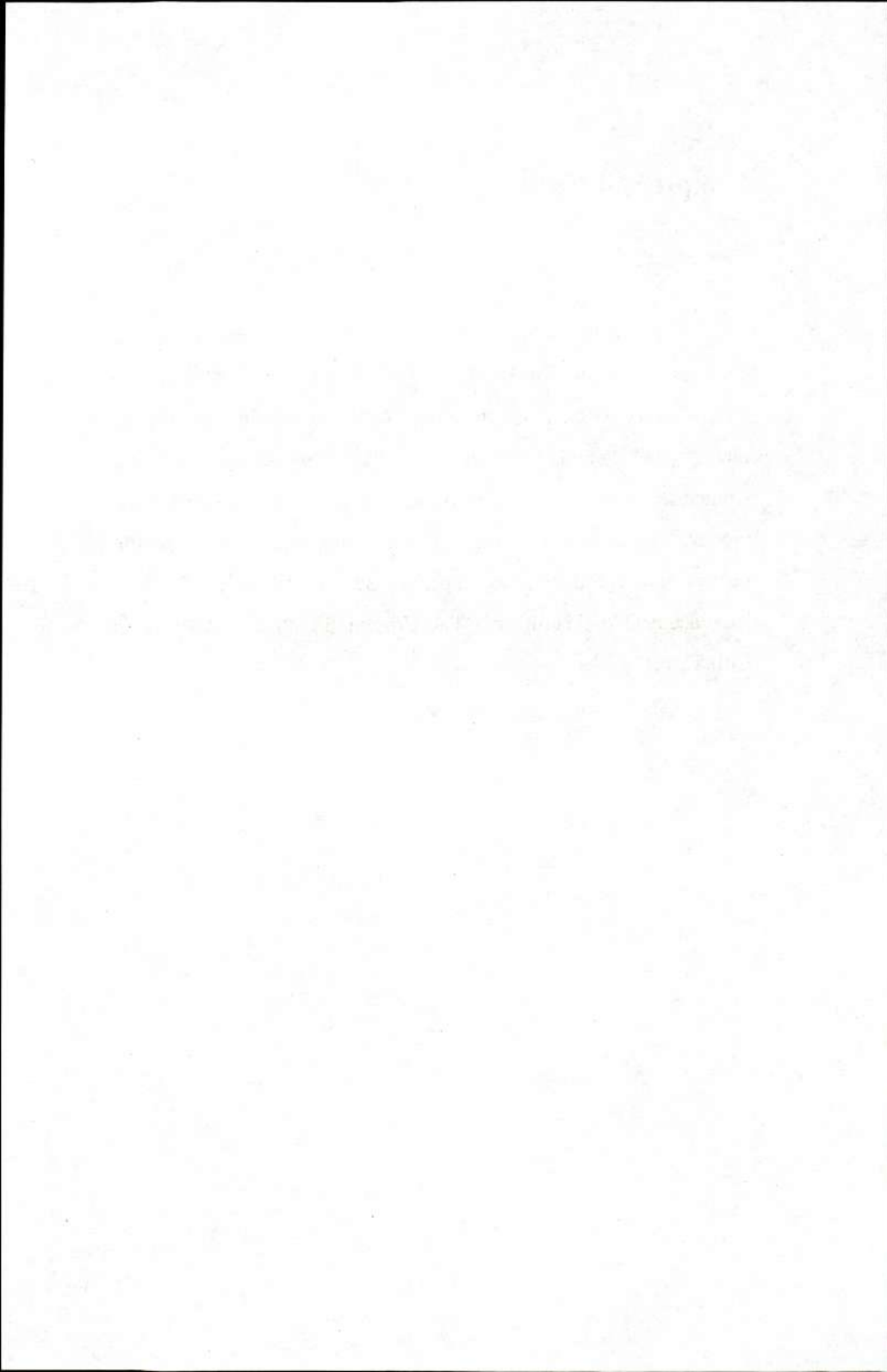


Chinese theologians can integrate Chinese culture with Biblical theology to construct a contextual theology. We believe this is not only their task, but also the task of Chinese churches, and we should work together for the common target of liberating Chinese women.

## Chapter Notes

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<sup>1</sup>In a national survey on what Chinese women want, the results are: a happy family 72.7%; good health 62.7%; peaceful life 54.7%; good personal relationship 27.3%; successful career 42%; money 10.0%; status 9.3%; power 2.6%. This survey shows that women are not keen on the struggle for status, power, career and money. What they hope for is a good life -- happy family, health, peace and good relationships. See Association for the Advancement of Feminism, "The Current Situation of Women in China", p.17.



## **Part II**

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## **Responses**





# **Response A**

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**Ms. Rose Wu**

**Hong Kong Women Christian Council**

## Introduction

Because women comprise 70 percent of the members of the Church in China, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Lutheran Theological Seminary (LTS) in Hong Kong have wisely chosen them to be the subject of this research project undertaken by Mak Wing-on. This decision not only reflects the concern of LWF, LTS, and the author for Chinese Christian women but also recognizes the importance of this marginalized majority to the life of the Church in China.

Although I appreciate being asked to comment on this research paper, I feel that my response to this project is limited by my lack of knowledge about China's Christian Women, for the primary thrust of my work is related to feminist theology and the experience of women in the Church in Hong Kong. My understanding of Christian women in China is merely based on several visits to the mainland in the past few years to meet women, pastors, and officials in churches and seminaries there as well as through information contained in books, articles in journals, etc. I also feel constrained to adequately respond to Mr. Mak's paper because of the the nature of the work- academic research. I consider myself to be a novice in the field of women's studies. Again, my work puts me in another area of involvement - the women's movement in Hong Kong - rather than in a position that looks at local women's issues through the eyes of a scholar.

Thus, because of my experience, the observations that I will make will be based on the views of a Hong Kong Chinese Christian woman with a feminist perspective. Perhaps it is the feminist filter through which I view the world that will be my contribution to this research project, a point of view that critically seeks to find meaning in the roles and experiences of women in the Church and in society.

Before I share my thoughts, I would like to acknowledge once again the valuable work that Mr. Mak has done on this project that has been initiated by LWF and LTS. Because the subject of this study is women, however, an approach involving women as participants in the project - perhaps through a research team composed of both men and women - would add to the inputs of this endeavor.

## **I. Structure, Content, and Methodology of the Research**

In reviewing the structure and subject matter of this project, it is evident that the structure is quite comprehensive and the scope of the material presented is quite broad. However, because the topic covered is so vast, it tends to lose a specific focus and consequently provides only a general overview of a great deal of material. To sharpen the research, I suggest that the objective of the first two sections be confined to providing background material for the project with the third section becoming the principal focus of the research with more emphasis placed on this area.

As for the source of information on which the content of the research is based, it is primarily derived from various books and research papers, particularly the first two sections; there is a lack of input from the activities of the women's movement in China throughout history or the experiences of women on the mainland, especially through personal interviews that could reveal the oral history of China's women, thus giving life to the other data and statistics that form the basis of this research. An important event in the life of the women's movement is missed, for instance, because only a brief outline of the movement in China prior to 1949 is provided. Consequently, the significant awareness in consciousness about women's liberation in both men and women that occurred

during the May 4 Movement in 1919 is omitted.

Part of the dilemma is that historically history has been written by men from their perspective. In the past, it was simply assumed that men's history or men's interpretation of history was the history of the whole of humanity because men have been the principal subjects of history. As a result, there has been no women's history, no collection of the stories of women living in a particular context during a particular time. Therefore, it is difficult to use the history of women in research projects like this.

Nevertheless, since the 1970's, there has been a rapid development of women's studies in the West, which has exposed the need for further studies about women's history. There have been two basic approaches in this area. One is to find and collect women's stories in history, thus illuminating their social, economic, and political biographies in order to remember those who have been forgotten in history. The second approach is to apply the feminist perspective to analyze how women have been and are exploited and abused in a patriarchal society, including a critique of the social norms of a particular place and time, social norms that normally condone discrimination against women. The scholar Gerda Lerner has traced this predominant trend in history and has noted that when one attempts to retell women's stories, to write women's history, one already is challenging the traditional or authoritative version of history. Previously, as indicated above, it has generally



been accepted that the established interpretation of history is the only valid account of the past and is true. By using the perspective of women to retell history, however, one can see that the old formulation of history is a distortion of the real story of women.

In terms of methodology, there is a similar analogy to the differences between men's history and women's history, for there are two basic approaches to contemporary academic research on women's studies today, especially concerning its purpose, that are significantly at odds. The more traditional process is to select women as the subject of research; women become an object of interest. Because the researcher employing this traditional framework chooses to undertake a study on women does not necessarily indicate that they support the liberation of women. In fact, the attitudes behind this type of research can consciously or unconsciously produce results that reinforce the patriarchal patterns of behavior and values that are present in society that oppress women. Feminist research, on the other hand, seeks to liberate women by critically analyzing the patriarchal structure of society that marginalized women.

This difference in approach is evident in the first section of the research under review that addresses the cultural influences on women as well as their history in China. For instance, the research paper only enumerates the Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist writings and teachings that pertain to women, noting their negative

and positive aspects that affect the status of women in Chinese society but without determining the root causes of their oppression. From my feminist perspective, I understand the source of suffering of China's women, especially in the past, to be found in the country's patriarchal family structure that has energetically emphasized the male lineage, compelling women to be dependent on men throughout their lives for their identity and value in society. Consequently, in a society with such a family structure, women have had no alternatives outside of marriage to define themselves and survive. Thus, the first section of the paper would be more complete if a sociological analysis of the lives of women in China in the past was included.

In the second section devoted to women in contemporary China, a weakness I believe is its heavy reliance on official government documents, which naturally express the government's interpretation of reality. The question that then arises is, How representative is this material of the actual experiences of China's women? Because the Chinese government is a top-down, male-dominated institution, its view of the life situation of women is most likely a reflection of its structure, a point of view that excludes the perspective of grassroots women whose lives it purports to understand and can explain. In this case, the dilemma for interpreting the lives of China's grassroots women authentically is an issue of class and gender, for most government officials, especially those occupying high positions, are men who are

separated from grassroots women by both their status and their sex.

Relying on the documents of the present government in China holds other pitfalls as well, for it is founded on a Marxist ideology that espouses the theory that women should be liberated. Marxism, as is well-known, is grounded on a social analysis of society based on class and champions the view that the liberation of women is tied to the liberation of the working class. Based on the history of the world's socialist countries, however, including China, Marx's theories have not fully been realized in practice, and the liberation of the masses has not led to the liberation of women.

Another limitation of the second section of the research paper in my view is its omission of the effects of China's open door policy on women. Since Deng Xiaoping steered China toward a more capitalist economy in 1979, such socio-economic pursuits as selling wives, prostitution, and the phenomenon of "second wives" that has affected Hong Kong's women as well as those on the mainland have become more prominent as have the exploitation of women workers in China's factories, hundreds of whom have lost their lives in a series of factory fires in just the past few years in southern China.

To overcome the above obstacles to more valid research, to go beyond the official government documents for information, one can begin by listening to grassroots women, chronicling their stories,

and incorporating their oral history into the research findings. This approach is more grassroots-oriented, more feminist-oriented. The research results should then yield a greater understanding of the ways in which women are exploited and oppressed by their culture, government policies, economic conditions, etc.

The research can also be enhanced through the use of gender analysis. For example, contemporary academic research about women using traditional methodology can present the data that explains the experiences of women, but it often does not question why women have these experiences. Why, for instance, are women frequently unskilled workers? Why is China's illiterate population predominantly women? Why are women unable to develop themselves in the same manner as men? The researcher when undertaking a study about women must, I believe, find answers to these and other questions in order to elevate the research from a mere recording of reality to an understanding of why that reality exists.



## II. Women in the Church in China

In the last section of the research paper about the Church in China, I appreciate very much Mr. Mak's methodology of interviewing Chinese Christian women rather than relying on the official documents of the government. The content of this section is, thus, based on the reality of women and is very useful in better understanding their lives. Through their stories, the problems faced by women pastors and the conservative thinking found in the Church and in the family are clearly revealed. It is also evident that most of the members and volunteers in the Church are women and that it is through their witness in society that increasing numbers of friends, family members, neighbors, etc., are drawn to Christianity. The quotes of women leaders in the Church, both clergy and lay, also make clear the double efforts that are required for them to prove that they are as capable as their male counterparts.

Based on my visits to churches in China, I have noticed that there is a vast difference between the churches in the countryside and those in the cities. This is reflected in the attitudes of congregational members as well as in the structure of the church and its character; for in the rural areas, the church community resembles a fellowship group in which the participation of all members is welcomed and encouraged. In the urban churches, the structure is much more hierarchical, and decision making is more limited to a few people. In



the first model, women feel more empowered to speak and take part in decision making; in the second model, women feel that their role is to be followers. Thus, the research I feel would be enriched by a comparison between these two types of churches in China and the distinct contexts in which they exist.

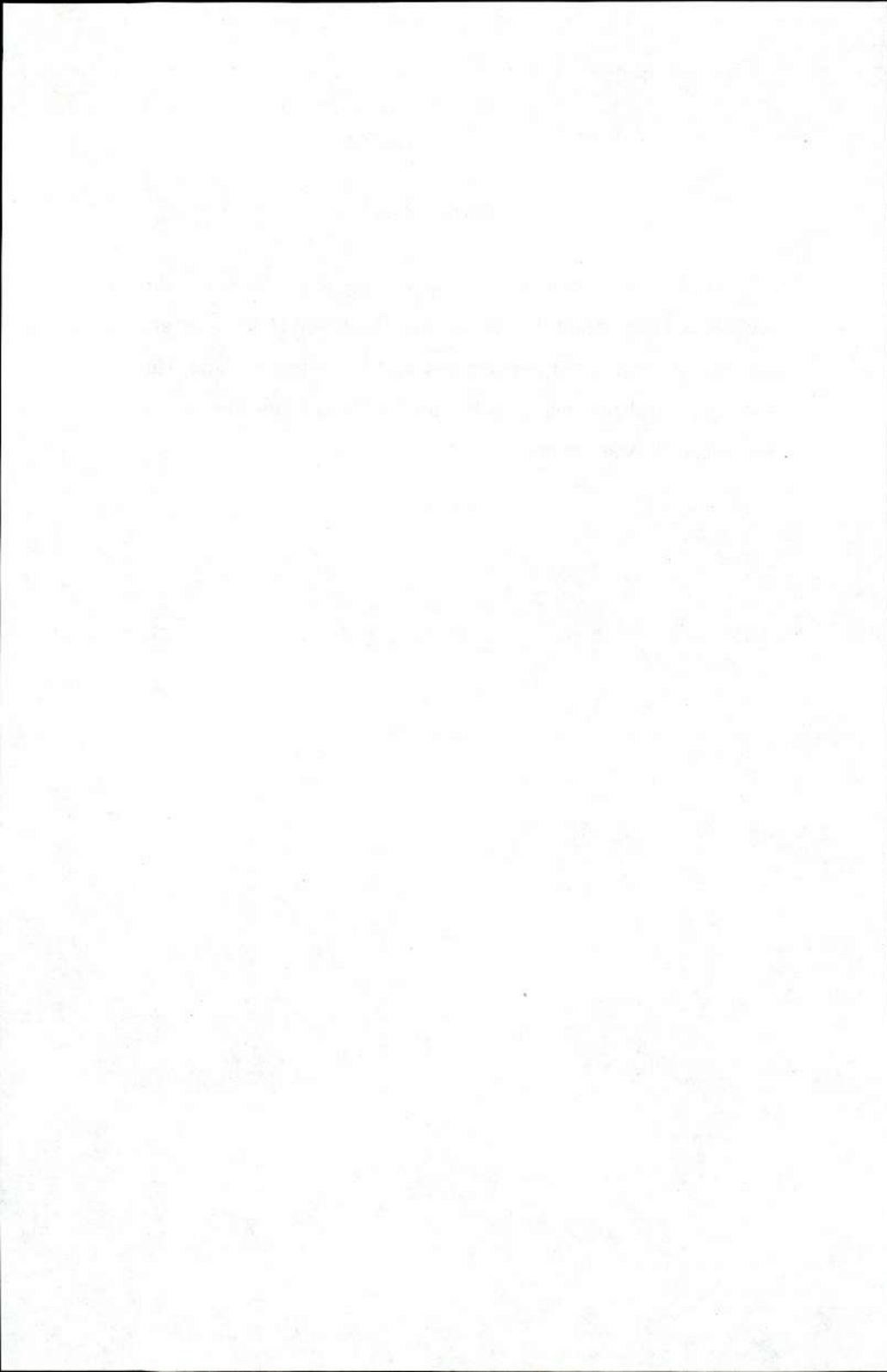
Another area that is absent in this section of the research paper is an inquiry of how pastors interpret the role of women in the Bible and in the Church. In other words, what is the theology behind their teaching? This is an important concern because, even though the Church accepts women as ministers, it does not necessarily indicate that they support the liberation of women. As noted above, for example, women comprise a large proportion of the Church's volunteers - a role that reflects the message of Paul's theology that is prevalent in China, a theology that glorifies sacrifice for the Church, for the family, for the country. Seldom do China's pastors, theologians, and church leaders affirm the theology of the Magnificat that uplifts the lives of the oppressed, a theology of liberation that is Good News to women who are socialized by the theology of Paul and by society to accept their inferior status in the Church, in the family, in society.

No, rather than being a recognition of the equality of God's human male and human female creations, it is possible instead that the ordination of women may be more a reflection of market forces at work in China than a reflection of expanded opportunities for women

and an acknowledgment of their dedication and service, for Chinese men may find the hard work and low pay of a pastor to be unattractive. In short, allowing women to become ministers may be yet another way to relegate women to an inferior position in society, especially when those who are ordained rarely hold key positions in the Church that are responsible for decision making. Addressing this concern creates a dilemma for the Church, however: if it increases the pay of the clergy, more men will most likely be drawn to service in the Church; and while the status of the clergy may be raised, the opportunity for women to serve will probably be diminished.

## **Conclusion**

Once again, I appreciate the opportunity to play a part in this process as a respondent. I hope that the churches in Hong Kong and abroad can continue to undertake research on women in China. This is not just a valuable endeavor for the Church in China but also for the global Christian community.



# **Response B**

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**Dr. Pirkko Lehtio**

**Professor, Lutheran Theological Seminary**



## Introduction

Speaking about women in China and in its church is a difficult task. Woman is not just a concept we can use in one way. There are women and churches in cities, there are women and churches in remote areas. There are well trained women and illiterate ones. Their life situations are different. Our approach should also be very different.

Speaking about the church in China without defining its nature gives the readers a wrong picture because every reader looks at it from his/her point of view and thinks he/she understands what is said. The Chinese church however is unique in some senses. Using statistics is a very normal way to describe the development that has happened. We are able in this way to see the improvement in the situation of women. It is obvious concerning China, but it does not say very much about the life of women in the church, how they understand their own situation and what their expectations about their situation could be.

This kind of approach still has problems. Do we observe women as objects without their own trends and will? How can we take women as subjects because they are the majority of the church members and not exceptions? It would be more correct to take the males as exceptions in the church and to take into consideration how they have assumed their power and position.

## **I. What is the Contemporary Chinese Church?**

She defines herself as postdenominational. She sees herself to be at another level than the denominational churches divided in groupings according to their doctrinal differences. This fact can be seen positively as an improvement or as a provisional situation. To the mainline churches it is an arrangement in which there is no change in the political or social situation. It is a difficult fact to be accepted by the mainline churches that see their own situation as the norm. In China, there are not the doctrinal struggles on baptism, Eucharist and ministry. A variety of practices are accepted at the same time. This situation in China can be described from the outside by saying that the state has forced the churches into this situation. But is this approach not too easy? Can we not accept the reality that there are churches which are not interested in the old doctrinal struggles? There are similar situations in some other Asian countries, too. I have learnt that the Chinese are pragmatic and are not interested in doctrines. In the Chinese church the common witness of Christians is more important than the internal differences. What a challenge to ecumenical Christianity!

What does this mean for the status of women? From one point of view, it gives the church freedom to solve the issue of ministry easily. I know that this raises reactions in the mainline churches. It cannot be solved so easily, because the churches are doctrinally very far away from each other. But it has happened in China. After

suffering it was necessary to have unity for starting the church anew and for receiving the confiscated church buildings.

From the other point of view, there are among the Chinese Christians their own Chinese groups emphasizing some traditional, conservative Chinese understanding of Christian faith including the status of women. Those groups are e.g. the Little Flock and the Jesus Family. They do not accept women in church ministry. The secondary status of women depends on the conservative interpretation of the Bible and the traditional cultural background that understand women as inferior. There are ordained women who are not allowed to administer the sacraments and to preach. What meaning does ordination have in those cases?

On the one hand the church can give women more and more authority or power because of the lack of theologically trained persons. Today 80% of the church leaders are laypersons. On the other hand, the church follows society in this matter. The communist government established the equality of men and women very early, in some parts of China already in 1927. In praxis, this concerns education and work outside the home. This kind of equality in any country does not yet mean equality in a deeper sense.

The same concerns are also found in the church. Although practical needs push women into church ministry, the deeper identity of women and the common understanding of the change in women's

life is not yet completed. Biblical hermeneutics is needed.

If we describe women's situations according to the number of women in ministry we cannot yet express how the church sees the special problems of women in their teaching. The 70% of church membership with their daily problems is not yet accepted as a majority so long as leadership is totally in the hands of the minority, that is the male church members. But there is already a good start.

The postdenominational church and women are the big challenges to the Chinese church. However, the church in China has also sought to find new ways into this issue through Feminist Theology. It has started by sending scholars to study abroad.

One accusation against Feminist Theology in Asia is that this is a Western matter which is not suitable for the Asian churches. Therefore, it is important that Feminist Theology assume Asian characteristics. The women's movement, with its demands for equality of men and women, is not new among Chinese Christians. Christian women have raised their voices for equal opportunities for women already at the beginning of this century. Chinese women asked for equality in the church at the same time they asked why the women missionaries did not have the same rights as their male partners even though they had spoken about equality among the Christians.



## II. The One-Child Policy in China

For the Chinese government this policy was an effort to regulate the growth of population. The Chinese church and Chinese Christians, e.g. in the YWCA, have accepted this policy because of the big problems the country has to face. This is a common family issue but it concerns women in a very special way.

Family matters are not private to an individual family member. The same is true for the church as God's family as well as the whole community. Following this policy means very strict control of people's sexual lives. There is no privacy. Elderly women are in charge of enforcing this policy. The family can be punished in one way or another if an unexpected pregnancy appears after the first child. That concerns women physically. The first problem to face is an abortion. How is it to be done? How painful is it for a woman? What deep psychological pains can it cause? If it is by force, can it humiliate and hurt a woman? How can the church stand by them in their troubles? How can they be healed afterwards?

The second question concerns the sex of the fetus. If it is a female and the family wants to have a son how can this problem be solved? The consequence can be the abandonment of the newborn baby girl. What does the church teach about the human worth of a baby girl? What is it to be neglected because of your sex as a baby? A hidden baby girl does not exist and she can be excluded from



education and any human rights. It is known that the government and different organizations try to do their best so that this will not happen. The challenge to the church is how to support people in their decisions. The attitude toward baby girls is decisive. In the future there will not be enough women for men to marry. This will be a huge problem.

### III. The Serving Church

The birth rates of different countries decreases when the education of women is raised. Therefore the contribution of the church and Christian organizations is very significant in the educational field. In the YWCA retired women, who are well educated, qualified and experienced, make efforts to use their talents in education and health care. In this way they show that Christians serve the community.

In the church the education of men and women is one of the basic tasks. Christian education among church members is important. The theological and biblical understanding of *diakonia* brings a special contribution of the church to society.

Service and preaching go hand in hand in the Chinese church. They support each other. Women and men in the church are the arms of Christ in helping people in need at the grass-root level.

The majority of church members (70%) are women. Why is it so? What brings women into the church? The gospel liberates people from old cultural thinking and gives freedom for service. To serve the husband and the children that has been seen as the task of the wife and mother has lost its rationale because as one child grows up in some years, there is time and energy for others. Younger women are often full-time workers but older ones also have possibilities to

help others. The women in the church have found this field for their creativity, service and purpose in their lives. Women can feel that they are needed, that there are tasks where they can use their capacities for others in the spirit of the gospel with all other women. From women's point of view the nature of the church is service.

The church is full of women. Traditionally they have been marginalized in the community. They have been bound by very many limitations. In faith, they are free from that, they are free for worshipping, learning and praying, in a field that is important to them and central in the Christian faith. From this point of view they are then also open to see the needs of others.

If we think of the church in the way that Jesus taught, "the greatest is he/she who serves," the Chinese church through their women, the majority of the church, teaches something very central about the nature of the church. In the leadership of the church are the male church members. Into that situation the women gradually bring their point of view. But leadership is always a very narrow sector of life. There is so little space for many men. Therefore their number in the church is limited. Isn't it so?

The challenge to theological education in China as well as all over the world in the churches today is to find the biblical point of view on human beings as females and males. The improvement in the situation of women is only part of this issue. The most relevant

question is, "What is the understanding and identity of the male members in the Chinese church." What do we teach about the church ? What is her nature ?

## **Conclusion**

Thinking about the discussions with some women's groups of the church in China one and half a years ago I remember how capable were the women we met. When they had the opportunity to express themselves they started to speak about the activities of women in the church: home visits, visiting sick people, teaching illiterate women and girls in the countryside and their joy in serving others in this way. Just when we had started to come to women's issues the time was over. But I got the impression that I would want to listen to them tell about their lives and thoughts to the other sisters and brothers in different churches in order to be refreshed by our common faith and by their experiences as church members and Christians in China.





## **Part III**

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### **Appendices**



## **Appendix A**

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**Feminist Theology in Contemporary China  
(1980-1994)**

**Mary Sun**

## **Introduction**

Feminist theology is a new topic for the church in China. Though early in the 60s and 70s, the feminist movement had already been raised in the Western churches, and there were already many writings by feminist theologians, it has just recently become an issue in the church of China. Since a majority of 70-80% of the believers in the church of China are women, the significance of ministry among women and of feminist theology is very great.



## **I. Feminist Theology in China in the 80s**

### **A. Important Conferences**

Before introducing the development of feminist theology, we shall first mention some important national Christian conferences.

After the "Cultural Revolution," the Chinese government began to evaluate the entire event, and tried to figure out the mistakes, including the policy on religion. After 1977 the government returned the freedom of religion to its citizens, which is of course a totally different attitude toward religion than that during the cultural revolution. The first result was that the government started to give back church properties and places for religious activities.

On April 8, 1979, the first church building where worship services started again was in Ningbo City, in Zhejiang Province; after that, church buildings all over the Mainland were reopened for worship services, liked flower buds after rain. So, it became necessary for The Christian Three-self Patriotic Committee of China to start having meetings concerning future church management.

From Feb. 25 to March 1, 1980, The Standing Committee of The Three-self Patriotic Committee of China met in Shanghai.

Decisions were made to establish religious organizations, to recover the publication of Tian Feng magazine, Bible printing, hymn book printing, and to reopen theological seminaries.

From Oct. 6 to 13, 1980, a Meeting of the Third Representatives of the Three-self Patriotic Committee was held in Nanjing at which the Christian Council of China was first set up. Among the 140 committee members, there were 17 women participants. The president was Bishop K. H. Ting and there were nine vice presidents, two of whom were women. These women were: Ms. Shi Ru Zhang and Ms. Jiang Pei Fen. Moreover, Dr. Wu Yi Fang was elected as the honorary president of The Christian Three-self Patriotic Committee of China. From this point, we can see that the status of women in the church of China was beginning to be recognized and seen as significant.

## **B. The Reopening of the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary**

On Feb. 27, 1981, the first seminary of the church of China - The Nanjing Union Theological Seminary - was reopened, and of the first group of 47 students, 18 were women (including myself). Almost half of the students that came in the following years were women.

On March 6, 1981, all the women students and staff members of the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary took part in the seminar for "The Eighth of March Women's Festival" organized by The Women's Federation of Jiang Su Province. The Vice-governor of Jiang Su Province, Dr. Wu Yi Fang, was the speaker for that day. She especially mentioned the inevitable status and function of women in society; and quoted the former chairman of China, Mao Zedong, who stated the theory that "women can hold up half of the sky." On the other hand, she also mentioned a Biblical figure, Deborah, who was a woman judge. During the interview with her, she encouraged us, the women students, to work hard and learn as much as possible, so that we may better serve society and the church.

### **C. The Rise of Feminist Theology**

On Feb. 20, 1982, Bishop K. H. Ting, during his speech for the Wednesday afternoon seminar at The Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, in addition to an "Evaluation on the Liberal Theology of Latin America," also gave an introduction to the feminist theology in Europe and in America during the 70s. That was the first time for us, the theological students, to get in touch with feminist theology.

In June, 1985, Bishop K. H. Ting gave a speech entitled "God is not a male"<sup>1</sup>, which was the first time we encountered the understanding of God from the feminist theological point of view.

He said,

“Because of the rise of the feminist movement, some discussion is also aroused among the churches, who oppose the one-sided view of God as male, and would rather see the feminist and motherly side of God, so that human understanding can be more complete concerning the love of God .... All the beauty of love, the unselfish love of human beings, including motherly love, can help us to understand about God. Isaiah 49:15 says, ‘So the Lord answers, “Can a woman forget her own baby and not love the child she bore? Even if a mother should forget her child, I will never forget you.”’, God’s love is expressed here through the image of motherly love.

Other texts, like Isaiah 66:12-13; 46:3-4; Deut. 32:18; Psalm 131:2; Mat. 23:37; Luke 15:8-10, have all used feminine imagery to describe the love of God and Christ Jesus to all human beings.

In Gen. 1:27 it says, ‘So God created human beings, making them to be like himself. He created them male and female’, which tells us that the image of God is not only male, but there are also female characteristics such as kindness, meekness, gentleness, caring, being easy to draw near, hard-



working with no complaint, and self-sacrificing which are all elements of God.

A Hebrew word which especially describes the kindness of God originated from the word which means womb, in other words, this love is a love which embraces the child, protects the child, nurtures the child, not so as to occupy the child, but to nurture it to grow until it is mature enough to live by itself.

In the Hebrew word for God, "Elohim", the first half of the word, "Eloh" comes from the name of a goddess, and to it is added "im" - the masculine plural ending. Therefore, it is too superficial and inaccurate just to see God as male. More precisely, the neglected characteristics of God which can be found through motherly love become now a contribution for us to help us increase our knowledge of God."

After the speech was published, it aroused a great deal of reflection and response from the churches. An important article is found in the Nanjing Theological Review, vol. 14-15, written by student Chen Kuan Rong, with the topic "The love of mother, the love of God, that cannot be compared with the love of father," the text is Isaiah 46:3-4. In another article, written by student Wu Ying, on the topic "the human nature, the women nature, ministry -- the contemplation of several women figures in the Bible", an attempt is



made to contemplate the Bible, to acknowledge God, and His ministry from the feminist point view.

#### **D. The Impact of Visits by Overseas Feminists**

On Oct. 19 & 28, 1985, respectively, a group of 9 women from Austria and a group of 18 representatives from the Women's Ministry Committee of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, came to participate in a seminar at the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary about the status of women and their function in church.

From May 12-14, 1986, a group from The United Council of Theologians of The Third World came to visit China, including the feminist theologian from Peru, Carmen Lora, who hosted a seminar about feminist theology in Latin America at the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. She gave an introduction to the development of and thinking about feminist theology in Latin America which was inspiring to the students. Later on, her speech was published in The Nanjing Theological Review, volume 5.

On June 2, 1990, at the invitation of the two Christian bodies of China, 10 theological professors from the United States, together with 10 Asian feminist theologians led by Dr. Kwok Pui Lan from Chung Chi College of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and Prof. Letty Russell from Yale University in the United States, came

to visit Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. They gave speeches, and hosted a seminar for some women students.

Later on in 1992, the Nanjing Theological Review (vol.16) published the speech by Dr. Kwok Pui Lan on "The Feminist Theology." Her speech was mainly about: 1. The feminist experience and theology; 2. Feminist theology and the Bible; 3. Significant points in feminist theology. At the end of her article she commented, "I hope that the Church in China will establish her own feminist theology."<sup>2</sup>

Her inspiring thinking has widened the view and thinking of many of the people in the Church of China, especially women evangelists, laywomen, women students and teachers in the seminary, and she has also stimulated them to rethink their theology, to study the Bible with a different view, and to acknowledge God in a new way.

Since women are the majority in the Church of China, the significance of feminist theology should be recognized, as should the significance of the ministry of women and to women, the importance of the status of women and their function in Church. It has even been said that "The key to establishing a better Church in China is to organize women in the Church well, so that they may work effectively for the Church."

## **II. The Ministry and Theological Education of Women in the 90s**

### **A. The Women's Work Committee of The National Council in China**

From Nov. 27 to Dec. 4, 1993, the second conference of The Fifth Committee of The Three-self Patriotic Movement of China was held in Shanghai, and together with the third conference of The Standing Committee of The Two Christian Bodies of China, they established the Women's Work Committee of The National Council in China. In addition, the 22 members on the proposed list for membership on Women's Work Committee were all approved at that time.

The Women's Work Committee of The National Council in China held its first conference in Shanghai from March 1-3, 1994. This was the first time such a conference had been held in the history of the Church of China.

During the meeting, the representatives presented much information concerning the situations of ministry among women in their areas, and they also shared much about their experience. They discussed in detail the status of women in the church, and laid out

the targets for The Women's Work Committee. They also invited Ms. Peng Ya Qian, a tutor from The Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, to give a presentation about feminist theology.

## **B. The First Course in Feminist Theology**

In the spring semester in 1993, for the very first time, a course on the subject "Feminist Theology" was taught at The Nanjing Union Theological Seminary by the young woman tutor, Peng Ya Qian.

The course included lectures, group discussions, and visits to church and social service organizations, so that students could learn to be concerned about the church and society. During the first semester there were about 20 students who took the course, while around 10 students took it during the second semester. The proportion of men to women among the students was about equal.

Through the teaching on the feminist theology, students learned to interpret the Bible from a new angle, and to recognize that God has both male and female aspects, both of which are needed for the complete revelation of God to man. This new course has attracted the attention of the seminary and the church, and has gained a lot of support from the students and tutors. However, there are still some students who are not yet well prepared for such new ways of thinking, and who have shown rejection or neglect for this kind of thinking.

Ms. Peng, in a letter to me, says, "I feel helpless, for it is not enough just to stay at the introductory stage. I have given much thought to how to make it more fitting to the features of China. I hope that I will make more effort to do research in China (for instance, on the situations of women in the village churches)."

Peng Ya Qian is the first young teacher in China teaching "Feminist Theology." Though she has read some books about feminist theology, she has as yet no formal training on such a special subject. That is the reason for her speaking as she does. The bibliography for her class is as follows:

**Chinese Bibliography:**

D. L. Carmody. *Women And World Religions*. Si Chuan: Si Chuan People's Press, 1989.

Lois Bernard. *Contemporary American Women*. Eastern Press, 1988.

D. W. Ferm. *Contemporary American Theologies*. Si Chuan: Si Chuan People's Press, 1989.

Yu Yan. *Female Anthropology*. Eastern Press, 1988.

Tang Sui Ming. *Outline of Contemporary Theologians*. Hong



Kong: Christian Literature Press, 1979.

Winnie Ho, ed. *Towards A Chinese Feminist Theology - Collection from Asian Chinese Feminist Theology Seminar*. Hong Kong : Lutheran Theological Seminary, 1988.

**English Bibliography:**

Letty Russell. *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective, a Theology*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.

Rosemary Radford Ruether. *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1983.

Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990.

Sr. Mary John Mananzen, ed. *Essays on Women*. Manila : Institute of Women's Studies (St. Scholasticas College), 1989.

Aruna Granadason, *No Longer a Secret*. Geneva: WCC, 1993.

Hope S. Antone, Yong Ting Jin ed. *Re-Living Our Faith Today - A Bible Study Resource Book*. World Student Christian Federation Asia-Pacific Region, Hong Kong.

Liberato Bautista and Elizabeth Rifareal. *And She Said No!*.

Philippines : National Council of Churches, 1990.

Virginia Fabella, M.M. Sun Ai Lee Park. *We Dare to Dream*. Asian Women's Resource Centre for Culture and Theology and the Eatwot Women's Commission in Asia.

S. R. Mary John Mananzan., OSB. *Women and Religion*. Manila : The Institute of Women's Studies (St. Scholastica's College), 1988.

Team of AWRC, eds. *Women of Courage*. Asian Women's Resource centre for Culture and Theology.

### **C. A Special Section for Feminist Theology in the Nanjing Theological Review**

In 1994, the Nanjing Theological Review, vol.1, provided a special space for "Feminist Theology," and published an article written by Peng Ya Qian on the topic: "Feminist Theology -- An evaluation of Traditional Christianity." She based her article on three main points to illustrate feminist theology:

1. God is a spirit, He is neither male nor female. She opposes the traditional point of view in Christianity which sees God as the father. Employing such a monolithic image to describe the character of God is quite incomplete. She quoted

from Isaiah 42:13-14, 49:15, Ps 131:2 etc. to illustrate that the Bible has often used those feminine images to describe God, so she suggests that feminist theology has applied a transcendent concept to acknowledge God.

2. Sin comes from one's mind, so women should not be accused of creating sin. Man and woman should each play a fair part as they are in a co-operative relationship and should be partners to each other.

Quoting from Mk 7:21 and Mt. 5:28, she suggests that women should not be accused as the source of sin since sin comes from one's mind. She opposes the traditional division of good and evil; she suggests that all human beings in society should bear a fair responsibility. There should be a co-operative relationship between men and women.

3. "We should not understand the words literally, but according to their meaning", in order to understand the Truth in love.

She once explained that the canon of the Bible has actually gone through a very long history, which was first passed down orally and then put into written form. The Bible has also gone through a great deal of editorial work. Besides,

the Bible was written in male-centred cultural background, so it is unavoidable that it be coloured with such strong male colour. Therefore, she has quoted from II Cor. 3:6 to point out that we should not interpret the Bible according to the literal meaning of the words, but historical critical methods and hermeneutical approaches should be used in the exegetical process.

Feminist Theology has challenged traditional Christianity in the following ways:

1. "The Old Testament has looked down upon the experience of women; that is only a factual reflection of history; therefore, Christians nowadays should not be influenced by the thoughts of some thousands of years ago, who were still fixed to the thought that women are inferior to men, or 'are born by mistake'<sup>3</sup>. All humans are created by God (Gen. 1:27), all in the same image of God, and all have the same value.

2. We should base our thought and actions on the teaching of Jesus; his attitude toward women is a good model for us. Conservative evangelism has exaggerated the view point of Paul and has neglected the principle of the love of Christ.

3. The message of the Bible is like living water, we should not pour 'new wine into the old wineskins', the gospel that

Jesus preached is a breakthrough from the law of the Old Testament.”

In her conclusion she states that feminist theology has challenged traditional Christianity to re-evaluate itself and has given it some answers in many ways; the purpose is not to reject Christianity, but to release the message and light to people today, so that more people may understand and accept Christianity.



## **Conclusion**

Feminist Theology is just at the starting point in China, but I see it is a good beginning. At the present time, since women's ministry is gradually being developed and promoted, many people have recognized the significance of the ministry of and to women, and the status of women and their effectiveness in the church. This also increases the status of feminist theology, especially with regard to exegetical and hermeneutical work on the Bible, and I believe feminist theology in China will be more and more widely spread in the process of continued development.

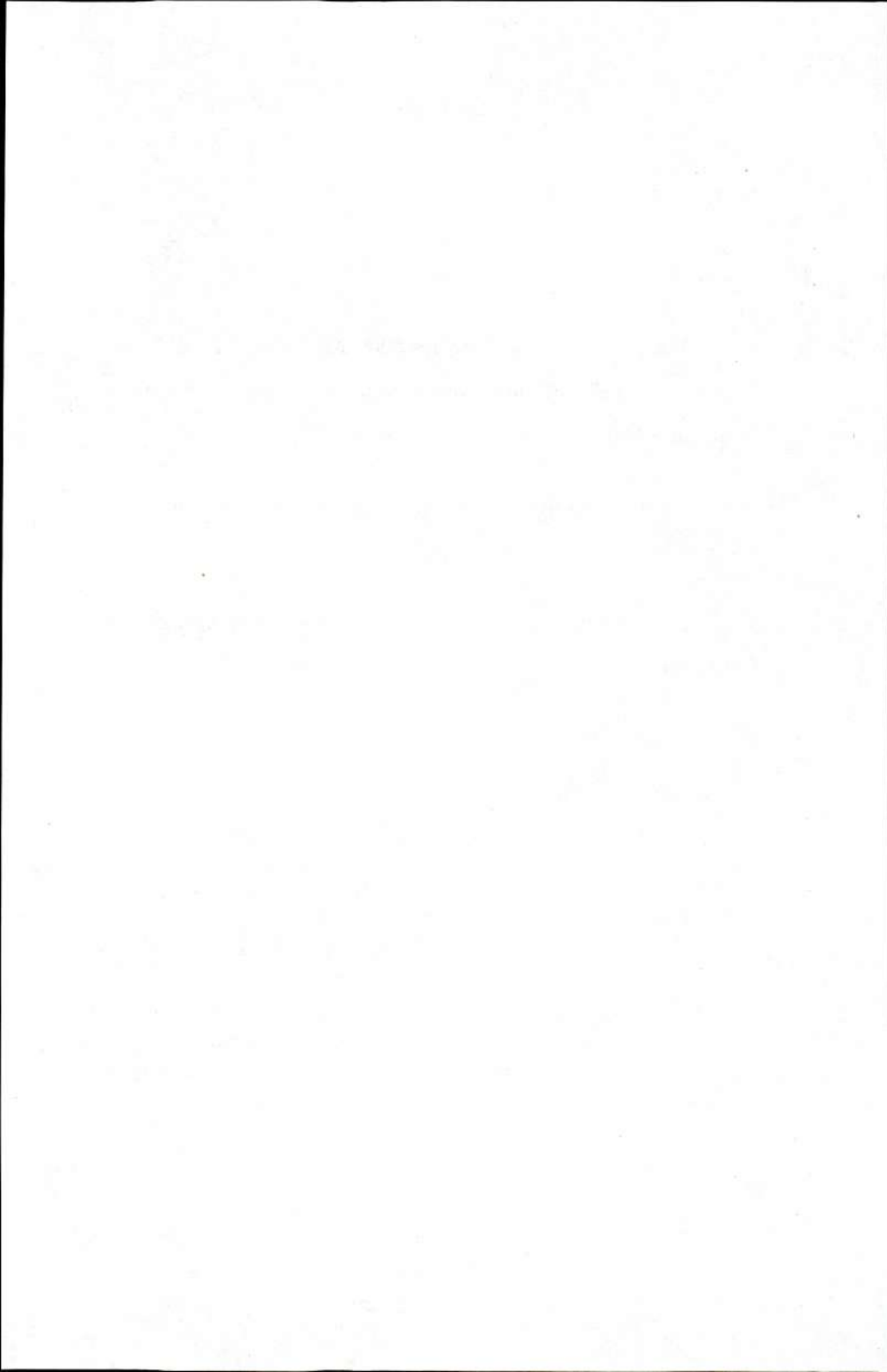
## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The title of Bishop Ting's sermon has been changed from "God is not male" to "Female, Motherhood and Divinity" and it was published in *Nanjing Theological Review*, pp. 33-35.

<sup>2</sup> *Nanjing Theological Review* No. 16, 1992 (Oversea ed.) pp. 51-55.

<sup>3</sup> D.L. Carmody. *Women And World Religions* (Si Chuan: Si Chuan People's Press, 1989), p. 134.



## **Appendix B**

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**Law of the People's Republic of China on Protection of  
Rights and Interests of Women**

## **Law of the People's Republic of China on Protection of Rights and Interests of Women**

**(Adopted at the 5th session of the 7th National People's  
Congress on April 3, 1992)**

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### **Chapter 1 - General Provisions**

Article 1. In accordance with the Constitution and the actual conditions of the country, this Law is formulated to protect women's lawful rights and interests, promote the equality between men and women and allow full play to women's role in socialist modernization.

Article 2. Women shall enjoy equal rights with men in all aspects of political, economic, cultural, social and family life.

The state shall protect the special rights and interests enjoyed by women according to law, and gradually perfect its social security system with respect to women.

Discrimination against, maltreatment of, or cruel treatment in any manner causing injury or even death of women shall be prohibited.



Article 3. The protection of women's lawful rights and interests is a common responsibility of the whole society. State organs, public organizations, enterprises and institutions as well as urban and rural mass organizations of self-government at the grass-roots level shall, in accordance with the provisions of this Law and other relevant laws, protect women's rights and interests.

The state shall take effective measures to provide necessary conditions for women to exercise their rights according to law.

Article 4. The State Council and the people's governments of provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government shall, by taking organizational measures, coordinate with relevant departments in ensuring the protection of women's rights and interests. The specific organs shall be designated by the State Council and the people's governments of provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government.

Article 5. The All-China Women's Federation and women's federations at various levels shall represent and uphold the rights of women of all nationalities and all walks of life, and strive for the protection of women's rights and interests.

The trade unions and the Communist Youth League organizations shall also, within the scope of their respective work, strive for the

protection of women's rights and interests.

Article 6. The state shall encourage women to cultivate a sense of self-respect, self-confidence, self-reliance and self-strengthening, and to safeguard their own lawful rights and interests by utilizing law.

Women shall abide by the laws of the state, respect social morality and perform their obligations prescribed by law.

Article 7. People's governments at various levels and relevant departments shall commend and award the organizations and individuals that have made notable achievements in the protection of women's lawful rights and interests.

## **Chapter 2 - Political Rights**

Article 8. The state shall guarantee that women enjoy equal political rights with men.

Article 9. Women have the right to conduct state affairs, manage economic and cultural undertakings and administer social affairs through various channels and in various ways.

Article 10. Women shall enjoy equal rights with men to vote and to stand for election.

Among deputies to the National People's Congress and local people's congresses at various levels, there shall be an appropriate number of women deputies, and the proportion thereof shall be raised gradually.

Article 11. The state shall actively train and select female cadres.

State organs, public organizations, enterprises and institutions must, in appointing cadres, adhere to the principle of equality between men and women, and attach importance to the training and selection of female cadres for leading posts.

The state shall pay attention to the training and selection of female cadres of minority nationalities.

Article 12. Women's federations at various levels and their member organizations may recommend female cadres to state organs, public organizations, enterprises or institutions.

Article 13. The departments concerned shall listen to and accept criticisms or rational suggestions regarding the protection of women's rights and interests; with respect to complaints or charges against, or exposures of infringement upon women's rights and interests, the departments concerned must ascertain the facts, and be responsible for the disposition thereof ; no organization or individual may suppress such complaints, charges or exposures or resort to retaliation.

### **Chapter 3 - Rights and Interests Relating to Culture and Education**

Article 14. The state shall guarantee that women enjoy equal rights with men with respect to culture and education.

Article 15. Schools and departments concerned shall, by implementing the relevant regulations of the state, guarantee that women shall enjoy equal rights with men in such aspects as starting school, entering a higher school, job assignment upon graduation, conferments of academic degrees and dispatch for study abroad.

Article 16. Schools shall, in line with the characteristics of female adolescents, take measures in respect of education, management and facilities so as to ensure their sound development in body and in mind.

Article 17 Parents or other guardians must perform their duty of ensuring that female school-age children or adolescents receive the compulsory education.

Where parents or other guardians fail to send female school-age children or adolescents to school, the local people's governments shall admonish and criticize them and, by adopting effective measures, order them to send their female school-age children or adolescents to school, with the exception of those who, on account of illness or other special circumstances, are allowed by the local people's governments not to go to school.



The governments, society and schools shall, in the light of actual difficulties of female school-age children or adolescents in schooling, take effective measures to ensure that female school-age children or adolescents receive compulsory education for the number of years locally prescribed.

Article 18. People's governments at various levels shall, in accordance with relevant provisions, incorporate the work of the elimination of illiteracy or semi-literacy among women into plans for illiteracy elimination and post-elimination education, adopt organizational forms and working methods suitable to women's characteristics, and organize and supervise the relevant departments in the implementation of such plans.

Article 19. People's governments at various levels and departments concerned shall take measures to organize women in receiving vocational education and technological training.

Article 20. State organs, public organizations, enterprises and institutions shall, by implementing relevant regulations of the state, ensure that women enjoy equal rights with men in their participation in scientific, technological, literary, artistic and other cultural activities.

## **Chapter 4 - Rights and Interests Relating to Work**

Article 21. The state shall guarantee that women enjoy the equal right, with men, to work.

Article 22. With the exception of the special types of work or post unsuitable to women, no unit may, in employing staff and workers, refuse to employ women by reason of sex or raise the employment standards for women.

Recruitment of female workers under the age of sixteen shall be prohibited.

Article 23. Equal pay for equal work shall be applied to men and women alike.

Women shall be equal with men in the allotment of housing and enjoyment of welfare benefits.

Article 24. In such aspects as promotion in post or in rank, evaluation and determination of professional and technological titles, the principle of equality between men and women shall be upheld and discrimination against women shall not be allowed.

Article 25. All units shall, in line with women's characteristics and according to law, protect women's safety and health during their work or physical labour, and shall not assign them any work or physical labour

not suitable to women.

Women shall be under special protection during menstrual period, pregnancy, obstetrical period and nursing period.

Article 26. No unit may dismiss women staff and workers or unilaterally terminate labour contracts with them by reason of marriage, pregnancy, maternity leave or baby-nursing.

Article 27. The state shall develop social insurance, social relief and medical and health services to create conditions allowing old, ill or disabled women to obtain material assistance.

## **Chapter 5 - Rights and Interests Relating to Property**

Article 28. The state shall guarantee that women enjoy the equal right, with men, to property.

Article 29. In joint property relationship derived from marriage or family, the rights and interests enjoyed by women according to law may not be infringed upon.

Article 30. Women shall enjoy equal rights with men in the allotment of responsibility for farmland, or grain ration farmland and in the approval of housing sites in rural areas, and women's lawful rights thereto shall not be infringed upon.

After marriage or divorce, women's responsibility for farmland, grain ration farmland and housing sites shall be secured.

Article 31. Women's equal right, with men, of succession to property shall be protected by law. Among the statutory successors in the same order, women shall not be discriminated against.

Widowed women have the right to dispose of the property inherited by them, and no one may interfere with the disposition thereof.

Article 32. Widowed women who have made the predominant contributions in maintaining their parents-in-law shall be regarded as the statutory successors first in order, and their rights of succession

thereto shall not be affected by inheritance in subrogation.



## **Chapter 6 - Rights Relating to the Person**

Article 33. The state shall guarantee that women enjoy equal rights with men relating to their persons.

Article 34. Women's freedom of the person shall be inviolable. Unlawful detention or deprivation or restriction of women's freedom of the person by other illegal means shall be prohibited; and unlawful body search of women shall be prohibited.

Article 35. Women's right of life and health shall be inviolable. Drowning, abandoning or cruel infanticide in any manner of female babies shall be prohibited; discrimination against or maltreatment of women who gave birth to female babies or women who are sterile shall be prohibited; cruel treatment causing injury or even death of women by superstition or violence shall be prohibited; maltreatment or abandonment of aged women shall be prohibited.

Article 36. Abduction of and trafficking, or kidnapping of women shall be prohibited; buying of women who are abducted and trafficked in, or kidnapped shall be prohibited.

People's governments and relevant departments must take timely measures to rescue women who are abducted and trafficked, or kidnapped. If such women have returned to their former places of residence, nobody may discriminate against them, and the local people's governments and relevant departments shall well settle the problems

arising thereafter.

Article 37. Prostitution or whoring shall be prohibited.

It is prohibited for anyone to organize, force, seduce, shelter or introduce a woman to engage in prostitution or employ or shelter a woman engaged in obscene activities with others.

Article 38. Women's right of portrait shall be protected by law. The use of a woman's portrait for profit-making purposes in advertisements, trademarks, window display, books, magazines, etc., without the consent of the interested woman shall be prohibited.

Article 39. Women's right of reputation and personal dignity shall be protected by law. Damage to women's reputation or personal dignity by such means as insult, libel and giving publicity to private affairs shall be prohibited.

## **Chapter 7 - Rights and Interests Relating to Marriage and Family**

Article 40. The state shall guarantee that women enjoy equal rights with men in marriage and family.

Article 41. The state shall protect women's right of self-determination in marriage. Interference with women's freedom of marriage or divorce shall be prohibited.

Article 42. When a wife terminates gestation as required by the family planning programme, her husband may not apply for a divorce within six months after the operation; this restriction shall not apply in cases where the wife applies for a divorce, or when the people's court deems it necessary to accept the divorce application made by the husband.

Article 43. A woman shall enjoy equal rights with her spouse in possessing, utilizing, profiting from and disposing of the property jointly possessed by the husband and wife according to law, which shall not be affected by the status of income of either party.

Article 44. The state shall protect divorced women's ownership of their houses.

At the time of divorce, the husband and wife shall seek agreement regarding the disposition of their jointly possessed houses; if they fail to reach an agreement, the people's court shall make a judgement in

accordance with the actual circumstances of both parties and be taking into consideration the rights and interests of the wife and their child (children), except as otherwise agreed upon by the two parties.

In a case where the husband and wife jointly rent a house or a room, the wife's housing shall, at the time of divorce, be solved according to the principle of taking into consideration the rights and interests of the wife and their child (children).

In a case where the husband and wife live in a house allocated by the unit to which the husband belongs, if the wife has no housing to live in at the time of divorce, the husband shall help her in this regard whenever he can afford to.

Article 45. Both parents shall enjoy the equal right to guardianship of their minor child (children).

In case where the father is deceased, incapacitated or under any other circumstances that make him unable to act as the guardian of a minor child (children), nobody may interfere with the mother's right of guardianship.

Article 46. At the time of divorce, if the wife becomes sterile because of the sterilization operation or any other reasons, the problem to bring up the child(children) shall be so handled that, while to the advantage of the rights and interests of the child (children), due consideration shall be given to the wife's reasonable demands.

Article 47. Women have the right to child-bearing in accordance with relevant regulations of the state as well as the freedom not to bear any child.

Where a couple of child-bearing age practise family planning according to the relevant regulations of the state, the departments concerned shall provide safe and effective contraceptives and techniques, and ensure the health and safety of the woman receiving any birth-control operation.



## **Chapter 8 - Legal Responsibility**

Article 48. When a woman's lawful rights and interests are infringed upon, she has the right to request the competent department concerned for a disposition or bring a lawsuit in a people's court according to law.

When a woman's lawful rights and interests are infringed upon, she may file a complaint with a women's organisation, which shall request the relevant department or unit to investigate and deal with the case so as to protect the lawful rights and interests of the complainant.

Article 49. Where punishments are prescribed by other laws or regulations for the infringement upon the lawful rights and interests of women in violation of the provisions of this Law, punishments prescribed in such laws or regulations shall apply.

Article 50. Anyone who commits any of the following infringements upon the lawful rights and interests of a woman shall be ordered to make corrections by his or her unit or by an organ at a higher level, and the person who is held directly responsible may, in light of the specific circumstances, be subjected to administrative sanctions:

(1) evading, delaying or suppressing the investigation and disposition of a complaint, a charge or an exposure regarding an infringement upon the rights and interests of a woman;

(2) refusing to employ women or raising the employment standards for women where women shall be employed in accordance with the provisions of relevant laws or regulations;

(3) infringing upon women's rights and interests by violating the principle of equality between men and women in such aspects as allotment of housing, promotion in post or in rank, evaluation and determination of professional and technological titles;

(4) dismissing female staff and workers by reason of their marriage, pregnancy, maternity leave, or baby-nursing ;

(5) infringing upon women's rights and interests by violating the principle of equality between men and women in the allotment of responsibility farmland or grain ration farmland or the approval of housing sites; or

(6) infringing upon women's rights and interests by violating the principle of equality between men and women in such aspects as starting school, entering a higher school, job assignment upon graduation, conferment of academic degrees or dispatch for study abroad.

Anyone who retaliates against a person making a complaint, a charge or an exposure regarding an infringement upon a woman's rights and interests shall be ordered to make corrections or be subjected to administrative sanctions by his or her unit or an organ at a higher level. If a state functionary commits retaliation, which constitutes a crime, the

offender shall be investigated for criminal responsibility in accordance with the provisions in Article 146 of the Criminal Law.

Article 51. Anyone who employs or shelters any women to engage in obscene activities with others shall be punished by applying *mutatis mutandis* the provisions in Article 19 of the Regulations on Administrative Penalties for Public Security; if the circumstances are so serious as to constitute a crime, the offender shall be investigated for criminal responsibility by applying *mutatis mutandis* the provisions in Article 160 of the Criminal Law.

Article 52. Where an infringement upon a woman's lawful rights and interests causes loss of property or other damage, the infringer shall make due compensation or bear other civil liabilities according to law.

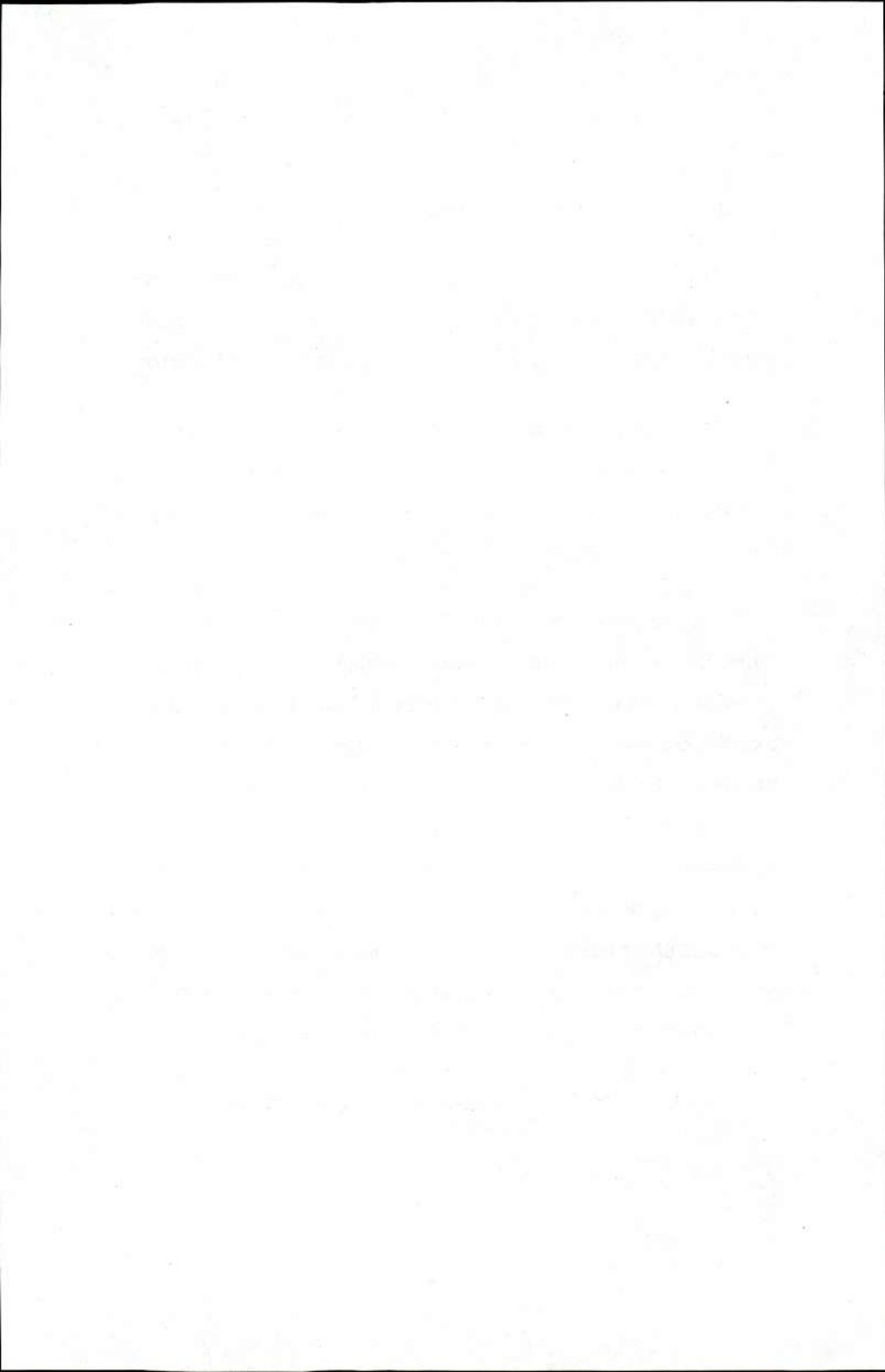
## **Chapter 9 - Supplementary Provisions**

Article 53. Relevant departments under the State Council may, on the basis of this Law, formulate relevant regulations, which shall be submitted to the State Council for approval and then be implemented.

The standing committees of the people's congresses of provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government may formulate measures for implementation on the basis of this Law.

The people's congresses of national autonomous areas may formulate regulations with appropriate adaptations or supplements in accordance with the principles laid down in this Law and in light of the specific conditions of the national women in respective areas. Regulations formulated by autonomous regions shall be submitted to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress for the record; regulations formulated by autonomous prefectures or autonomous counties shall be submitted to the standing committees of the people's congresses of the relevant provinces or autonomous regions for approval before entering into effect, and shall also be submitted to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress for the record.

Article 54. This Law shall enter into force as of October 1, 1992.





## **Appendix C**

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**Interview Form produced by the  
Research Committee**

## Interview Form

Interviewer:	Interviewee
Name:	Age:
Date:	Sex:
Time:	Church:
Place:	Position & Experience:
	Province:

~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~

### A. Personal Experience

1. How did you become a Christian?
2. Why did you become a preacher/evangelist/pastor?
3. Who has had the greatest influence on you in your life?

**B. The Role of Female Volunteers, Church Leaders and Church Co-workers**

1. Is the leader/preacher/pastor of your church male/female?
2. What is the role of female volunteers, church leaders and church co-workers in your congregation?
  - a. Volunteers
  - b. Church leaders
  - c. Church co-workers
3. Are there any differences between the job descriptions of female church co-workers and male church co-workers? If so, how are they different? Why? What are the theological/traditional reasons?
4. According to your view, how can the status of females be improved in the churches at your home place?
5. Are there any special meetings or programs for females in your churches?

**C. Ordination**

1. Do you prefer that the female pastor/preacher is married/single?  
Why? (not prefer 1 2 3 4 5 prefer)
2. Do you want to be ordained? Why? Why not?

3. Are there any differences between the job descriptions of female ordained pastors and male ordained pastors? If so, how are they different? Why?

a. Do the female pastors preach regularly?

b. Do the female pastors baptize?

c. Do the female pastors conduct/consecrate the Holy Communion?

4. Do the church members accept female ordained pastors? Why? Why not?

5. If you are a female ordained pastor, what are the difficulties that you are facing in your ministry as a female?

#### **D. Women in the Society**

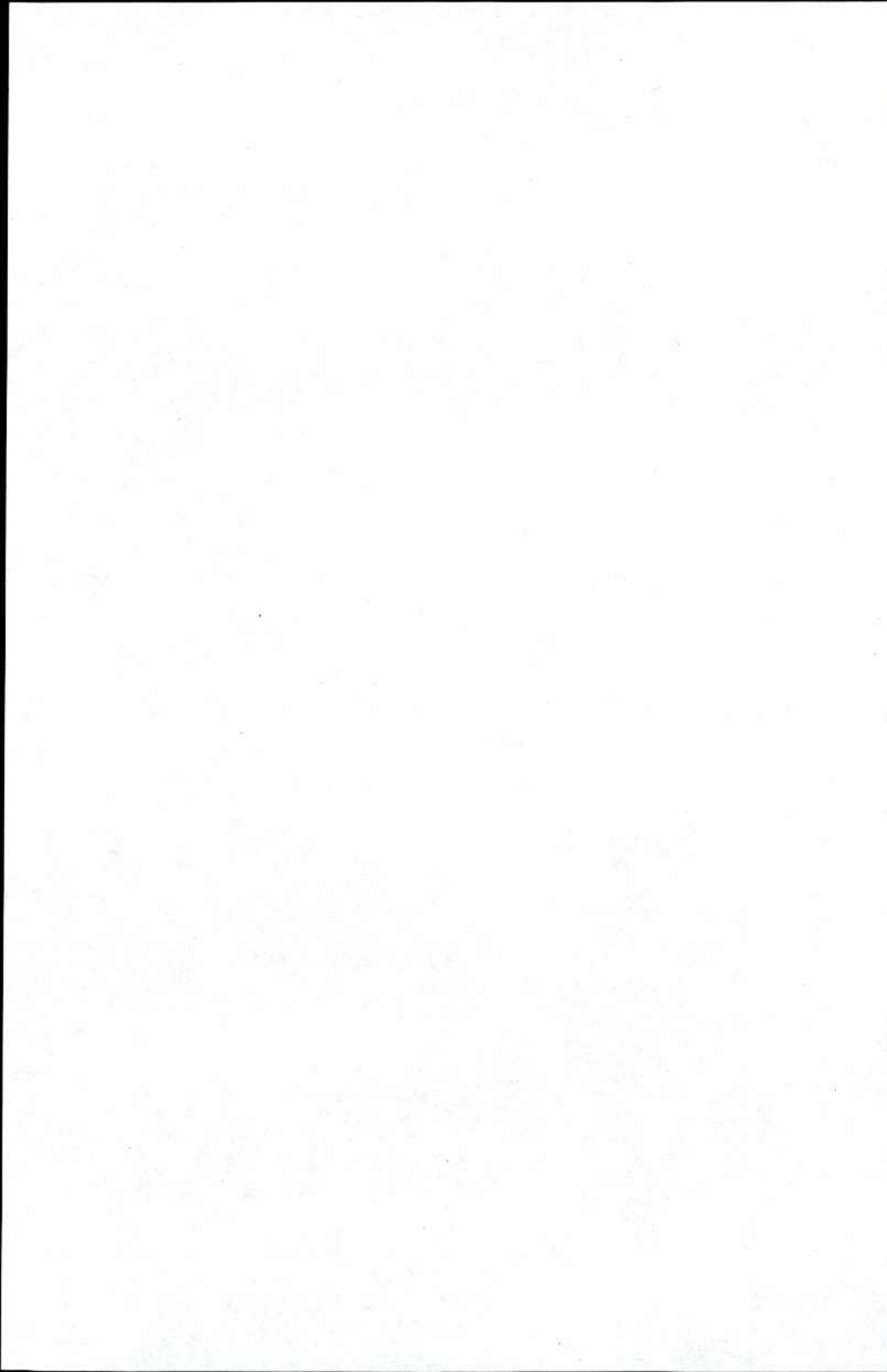
1. What is the role of Christian women in the family?

2. Are there any differences between the status of females in churches before and after the revolution? What? How? Why?

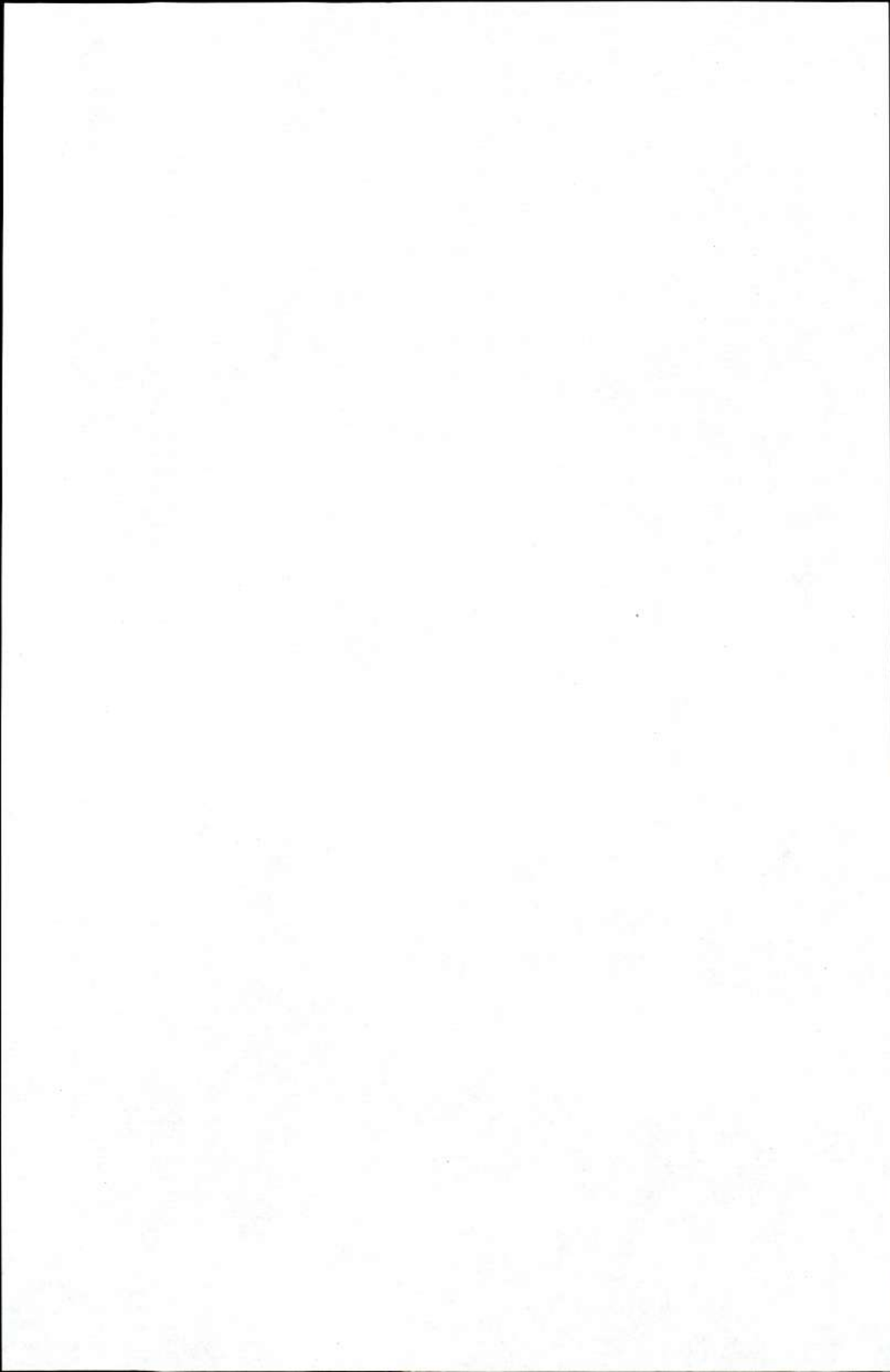
3. What is the status of women in the society?

4. In your opinion, what is the role of churches in raising the status of women in the society?

5. What are the reasons that there are more females than males in the churches, from your point of view?

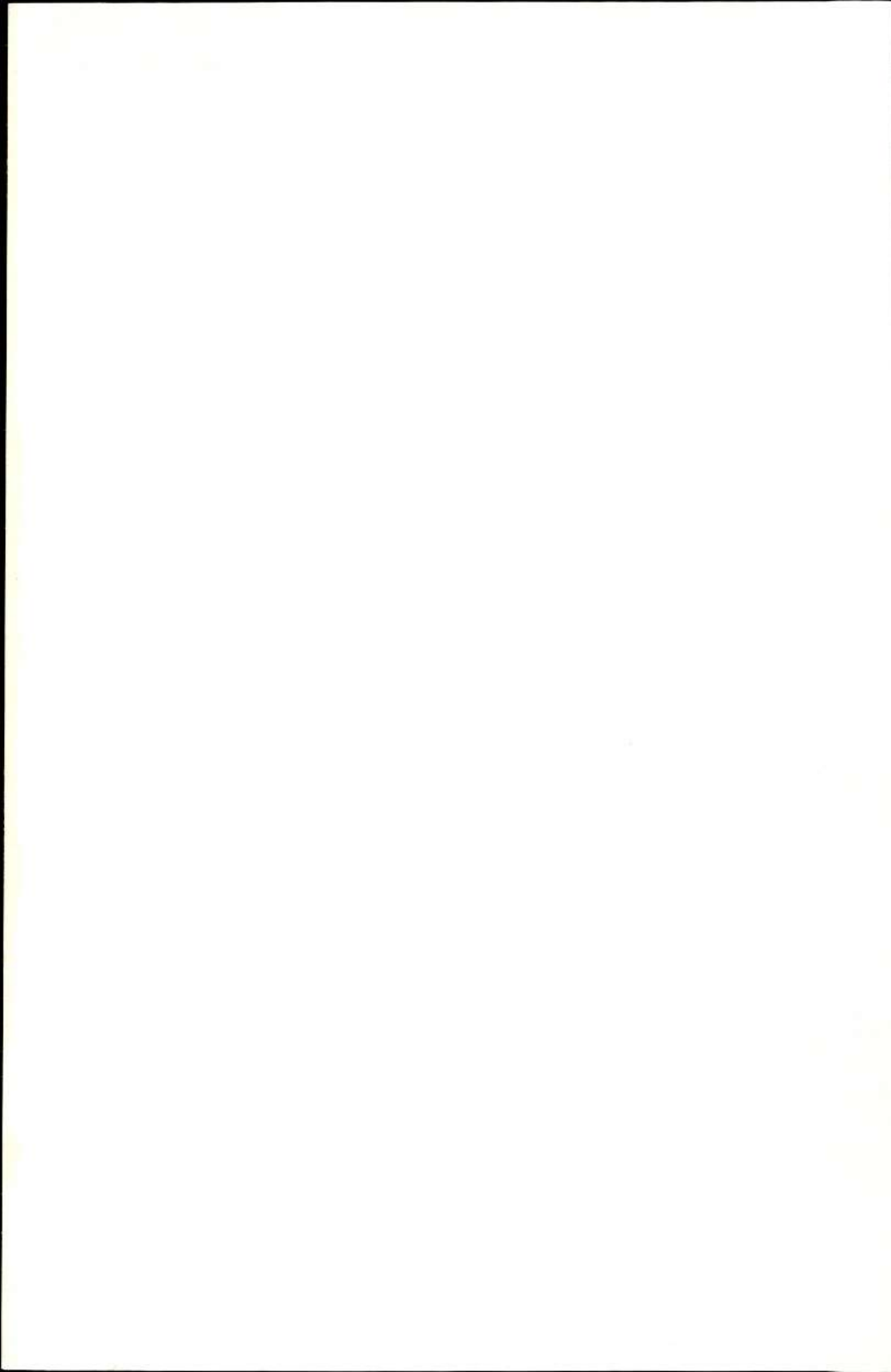


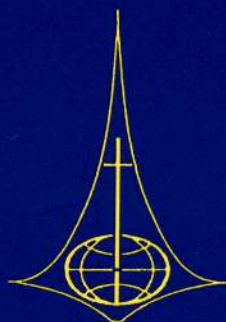












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